

PLATO'S MEMOIRS

D. R. Khashaba

This book is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

“Plato’s Memoirs,” by D.R. Khashaba. ISBN 978-1-60264-612-4.

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To
Kelsey Wood
a true Platonist

*Blessed are fools, for they are spared the
absurdities of the learned.*

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PREFACE

In line with my fictional *Socrates' Prison Journal* (2006), in this work I fictionally make Plato decide to put off the final revision of the *Nomoi* to write his memoirs, reflections on his life and works. The possibilities and the hazards of such a fictional venture are obvious. The attempt is audacious, yet I dream that if Plato were to read what I have written, though at one point or another he would say, "This is foolish", or "This is trite", yet at some other point he would say, "The fellow has got this right", and at just one or two points he might even say, "I would love to have written that!" Be that as it may: these are confessedly *my* reflections, but I believe them to be of true Platonic inspiration.

The reader will find much reiteration and repetition, much of going repeatedly over the same ground, as there naturally would be in reflections supposed to be written and actually written desultorily over a stretch of time and, supposedly and actually, suggested by random happenings, encounters, readings. I have deliberately allowed my Plato and permitted myself all that. My fear is not that that should be

found tedious or annoying but that in the end it should be found that not less but much more of it is needed to clear away the heaps of misunderstandings and falsehoods that have accumulated around Plato's work and thought and are being taken earnestly and without question by scholars and students of philosophy.

Indeed, I must confess it. I am in despair. The modern mind is simply, totally, incapable of understanding Plato or Idealism in any form. Let me resort to analogy. Assuming that a computer thinks. It has a brain. Its brain is its hardware. It does not think with its brain. It thinks with its software. Its software is a system of symbols representing notions. Now, assuming that a human being is a computer. Its hardware is its brain. It does not think with its hardware. It thinks with its software. Its software is a system of methodological programmes and linguistic and mathematical symbols representing notions. The makers of the modern mind, from Francis Bacon and Descartes (opposed as these seemingly are) onwards gave that mind a very narrow programme. Give it as input 'mind', 'soul', 'subjectivity', it immediately returns: "Illegal operation. System is shutting down." Such a mind can no more understand Plato than a computer programmed to compute the trajectory of a missile can understand "I wandered lonely as a cloud".

Modern thinkers do not lack intelligence, in some sense; perhaps they have too much of it — of that brand of intelligence they have. But their

minds are fixed in one direction, in an outward direction: they can only see things from without, as objects. Even mind, even their own minds they can only see as objects. They cannot look within; they are incapable of seeing the reality of the within. Kant's Copernican revolution did not go far enough. Even for him it did not go far enough and for his followers it was as if it had never been.

I am in despair. My books are now being translated into Arabic. Perhaps among Arabic-speaking readers, where the scientific mode of thinking is not yet firmly rooted, my books may be met with greater sympathy. But this is little comfort for me. I do not crave appreciation from pre-scientific minds. I want appreciation from minds that can break through the mental fetters imposed on the modern mind by the scientific programme. And it is sad that I have to explain, as I have repeatedly done before, that when I speak of passing beyond science I do not mean passing into the arena of dogma and superstition, but turning to the realm of our inner reality.

For the historical and topical particulars weaved into the memoirs I claim neither originality nor erudition. My sources – beside Plato's own writings – are time-worn sources known to all students of philosophy. If I have not, except very rarely, cited sources, put that to laziness. Where I have – also very rarely – fabricated some circumstance, I trust that the content would clearly announce the fabrication. In any case I do not expect any reader to use my

text as a source of factual material. After all, this, like my *Socrates' Prison Journal* and my *Hypatia's Lover*, is a work of philosophy-fiction or is philosophy in a fictional framework.

I have sometime been asked, For whom do you write? I do not write for students seeking to pass an exam nor for academics hunting for theses and theories to reduce to smithereens; I write for free spirits who, in reading a book, want to walk side by side with the writer, conversing in goodwill, on the understanding that both author and reader have one purpose; to explore and understand their own mind. But let me add, by way of warning, that this book is not for beginners; it presupposes familiarity with the works of Plato.

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Sixth-October City, Egypt
May 2010

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The following was originally intended as a preface to this book. As is my habit, I began it as soon as I formed the idea of writing the book and added to it disjointedly as the work proceeded. But even after I started working on the book, its plan and purpose were still hazy in my mind – more so than with any work I had undertaken before – and continued to change as I worked on. When I thought I had brought the memoirs to a close and began the revision work, I thought this would be ridiculous as a preface. Yet it says something about the book and I thought it would not be out of place as an apology for the book.

You will never penetrate to the inmost sanctuary of Plato's philosophy until you approach his works naively, until you read his writings with the innocence of an untutored child. Plato wrote dramatic plays, intended to be taken as such. As in all imaginative literature – all drama, all fiction, all poetry – the surface is all play, but below the surface the stance, the intent, the

message is in dead earnest. Thus there is no contradiction between our affirming, on the one hand, that all arguments and all theoretical formulations in Plato are to be taken with more than a grain of salt, and our holding, on the other hand, that Socrates' moral maxims and his so-called moral paradoxes are to be taken strictly literally and most seriously. This is antipodal to the mainstream academic approach to the works of Plato. Professional philosophers treat Plato's arguments and theoretical enunciations seriously and stringently while exerting themselves to excuse, water-down, and explain away Socrates' and Plato's foolish moral stance.

Plato, we are told, early in his youth, wanted to compose tragedies. I imagine that when he began to associate with Socrates there stirred in him that vague yearning to something sublime and profound, beyond the horizon of human vision, "The desire of the moth for the star, / Of the night for the morrow, / The devotion to something afar / From the sphere of our sorrow" which fires every great creative mind. By the time Socrates died, Plato, then 28, had absorbed the ideals, the values, the outlook that that wondrous man had made into the very substance of his life. But he (Plato) could not yet envision all of that set out within a coherent frame of thought.

Continuing my conjectural construction, I suppose that when Plato left Athens on a meandering journey immediately after the death of Socrates, he was driven primarily, not by fear of

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public agitation against the friends of Socrates as is sometimes asserted, but by the restlessness of a mind yearning for clarity, a restlessness augmented and intensified by oppressive grief for a grave loss and by perplexity at the mindlessness of the whole affair of the persecution and execution of Socrates by the democratic regime.

Then, I further suppose, all of this pent soul turmoil, seeking some vent, aroused Plato's latent dramatic talent. He would write dramatic pieces. Perhaps in the first place not only to keep alive the memory of that "best, most wise, and most righteous man", but also to re-live that most exhilarating of all experiences, the experience of inner luminescence and self-discovery that he had enjoyed when attending Socrates' discourses.

As he went on composing those dramatic pieces, Plato found that in the very act of creating those dramas he was becoming clearer in his own mind as to the principles and basic conceptions underlying the whole of Socrates' life and thought, and, no less important, he was gaining insight into his own mind and soul. So, essentially Plato's dialogues were an extended exploration, a lifelong journey of recovery and self-discovery. To be understood and appropriated they must be read as such.

With this in mind, my first thought for this book was to trace this journey by making a study of the dialogues in what seemed the most probable chronological order of composition. Then it occurred to me to let Plato himself tell the story.

By thus fictionalizing the account I would be able to delve imaginatively into the whole process without laying any claim or making any pretense to historical verity. After all, in all my writings my purpose has never been to make any scholarly contribution but to philosophize, to seek insight into my own reality and to stand face to face with the eternal mysteries of life and of being. This was also the idea and the purpose of my fictional *Socrates' Prison Journal*.

Of course in the dialogues, beside the enduring moral convictions and except when there is some other overriding purpose, Plato plants, or rather hides, in the interstices of the drama the kernel of a serious or knotty philosophical problem. Such for instance was the problem of self-knowledge raised in the *Charmides*, the problem of relations and the problem of relative terms in the *Lysis* (which may have been the seed out of which the *Parmenides* was to grow). Perhaps sometimes such problems arose in the course of the dramatic give and take, unpremeditated. Yet also in the case of such seminal philosophical problems what Plato gives us to hold and to treasure is the problem and not the 'solution': even where a seemingly complete solution is given, that in truth is only a passage into a limitless realm opened up for exploration, rather than anything finished and final. I do not

find it inconceivable that what I see as the very heart of the *Republic* and the perfect epitome of Platonism (from 472a in Book V to the end of Book VII) forced itself into the original scheme of the *Republic* with a will of its own. And there too the invaluable insight comes clothed in allegory, simile, and metaphor, and could never come otherwise.

The dialogues of Plato belonged to the literary genre of *Sôkratikoî logoi* that sprouted soon after the departure of Socrates. Antisthenes, Aeschines, Phaedo, Xenophon, all wrote Socratic dialogues. Who pioneered the genre, who imitated whom, who borrowed from whom — these are questions that I leave to scholars qualified for debating them. Whatever be the answer to these questions, I believe that the intent moving and shaping and orienting the writing was specific to every one of the authors concerned. A writer's personality, values, philosophy of life, and total philosophic outlook breathe life and sense into the writer's work. I believe that Plato's intent in writing his dialogues was unique to Plato, and it is only with Plato that I am concerned in this book. Let me add marginally, though I know it is foolish of me to do so: I believe that no one who does not wholeheartedly embrace the Socratic-Platonic values and philosophy of life is capable of

understanding Plato's works as I believe he intended them to be understood. My purpose in this book, as in all of my writings, is to induce at least a few people to take those values and that philosophy of life seriously, not just as the subject of clever academic dissertations.

Have I succeeded in presenting a convincing or satisfactory picture of Plato? I would be far worse than a fool if I were to think that I did. Plato was a whole world, with the depth of oceans, the expanse of skies, and the contradictions of all that is actual and all that is rich. It was not part of my purpose to present an all-rounded picture of either the man or of his philosophy. All I wanted was to dive in his oceans, soar in his skies, be rocked and knocked between his contradictions, seeking for myself insights to enrich my mind and my life. My readers should expect no more: I promise no more.

In all that I have written about Socrates and Plato, I had no desire to vie with the scholarly studies in this area — no desire to add to the mountains of so-called secondary literature on the subject. I am neither qualified to do this nor interested in doing it. I do not claim to have discovered, nor was it ever my prime intention to

discover, what Socrates or Plato thought. My sole purpose has been, through the works of Plato, to think for myself, to develop my own outlook on life and on reality. My writings are not, and were not meant to be, works of scholarship, but original philosophical works. It is true that, although I am averse to all *ism*, I have at times described my philosophy as a new version of Platonism, because it is helpful and often needful to have a brief characterization. But calling it new or original indicates that it does not adopt a previously 'finished' philosophy. Indeed, my philosophy is and will to the end be a philosophy in the making. I will not have it otherwise. Only by continuously rethinking our philosophy can it remain alive and true to life; only by ceaselessly puzzling about its inner mystery can a mind live.

What absurdities are the learned not capable of, especially where Plato is concerned! They loudly vaunt of discovering loopholes, faults, errors, fallacies, in Plato's arguments, forgetting that the man has told us explicitly, forcefully, and repeatedly that no writing can convey philosophical insight, that whoever takes a philosophical piece of writing with unmitigated seriousness must be a fool. When he took us with him to the threshold of the ultimately real, to The Good, he declared to us that It is beyond *ousia* and beyond *epistêmê* and impressed on us that we

can only speak of what we behold of The Good in metaphor and parable and myth — and those insightful metaphors and parables and myths must themselves be constantly demolished by dialectic. Yet our learned scholars write as if Plato intended to give us in any writing of his an all-sufficient account of anything. A philosophical statement — of whatever scope, whatever complexity, whatever sophistication — that presumes to be an all-sufficient account, completely consistent, without fault, without defect, without contradiction, must be a dead hulk, and the closer it comes to being true to its presumption the more dead it must be. Plato's writings are not meant to satisfy and put thought to rest, but to disturb thought and put it to fight. Plato does not give us views or theories to be accepted, but presents us with themes, faces us with problems, to be explored. Because that is what it is to philosophize; because no understanding comes to the mind from outside, but must come to birth within the mind in the act of exercising the native power of the mind, in the creative activity of the mind.

Critical readers will not be slow to detect in these Memoirs many a paradox. Let me here spell out the crowning paradox of them all, and a double-paradox at that. Plato did not mould his thought into a unified system and never intended

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his writings to present a finished theory, yet the guiding principle informing the Memoirs is that underlying the whole of Plato's thought and works there is a whole that is the completest and profoundest of philosophical wholes. But it is a whole that we can grasp and represent in no other way than by deliberately falsifying Plato's thought. The innermost secret of Plato's thought is pure spirit and spirit cannot be beheld from the outside except as clothed in borrowed dress. Let this be my apology for making Plato say what he never said. Would that erudite scholars confessed the same of their laboured expositions of Plato's theory of this and theory of that.

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1

After much labour and much contention against the infirmities of old age, I have at last, by the grace of God, finished the book that had, so to speak, kept me its prisoner for years. I intended immediately to begin revising the text to complete my release from this labour and see what else I have to attend to in the limited time that remains for me in this life. I was about to start doing that when it occurred to me that, leaving the *Nomoi* in the wax for the time being, I should devote some time to writing down my recollections and reflections about the happenings and experiences I have been through and especially about what I learned for myself and what I hoped to teach through my imaginative writings which, I have sadly observed, have already been met with more misunderstanding than understanding from persons who might have been expected to know better. Perhaps I was wiser than I thought when more than once I inveighed against trying to convey serious philosophical thought in writing. Socrates knew that the one

lesson he cared to convey to us, the need to look within ourselves and know ourselves, could not be put in any fixed writing. Before Socrates, serious thinkers, like Xenophanes and Parmenides, who concerned themselves with profound questions about the meaning and purpose of life and about reality, wrote poetry, because they knew that the insight they wanted to lead to could be suggested, could be presented as a far-off condition of soul to be aspired to, towards which the individual seeker and only the individual seeker could advance, but which could never be contained in a fixed formula of words. Heraclitus did not write in verse but he wrote poetically in parables and suggestive enigmatic sayings: I sought to do the same in my writings. Other wise men who wrote useful things in straightforward prose, like Hippocrates writing on medicine and like Gorgias writing on the art of effective speech and the art of good writing, were not trying to lift the veil off the ultimate mysteries of being and life and value, but to give practical guidance on practical matters. Anaxagoras wrote in prose, but, like his Ionian predecessors, Anaxagoras was concerned with the outer world and his *nous*, as Socrates found out to his dismay, was not what Socrates understood by *nous*.

2

Since it is as certain as anything in human life can be that I only have a short time before I depart, I have decided not to take time to chart

and plan these memoirs in advance as I was in the habit of doing for my dramatic works from the very first down to the *Nomoi*. I will put down my recollections and reflections haphazardly as they come and will indeed begin by relating how I came to write those dramatic pieces I have been referring to.

3

When Socrates departed I felt orphaned, abandoned, all alone, in a pathless wilderness. I wandered, fleeing from the places that were his habitual haunts and the people that were his accustomed companions that made his absence press more heavily on my chest. Yet I felt that when that divine enchanter passed away he left my soul pregnant with vision. My soul moaned and groaned and shrieked, desiring to give that vision birth. But thanks to the gracious gods I was not so foolish as to think that I could house the truth in words. I was desperate; I could neither quell the pangs and the crying within nor break the chains without. Until I considered. Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides all had souls pregnant with vision. They did not fetter the vision in vain words posturing as truth. They intimated the reality within in myth and image and symbolic gesture. The speechless soul let the ineffable reality go forth in words that were no longer chains but wings that gave the reality free flight. That inspiration set me free.

I surprise myself! I am inspired and write as I used to write when I composed the *Phaedrus* or the *Symposium*, but I must get down to earth and relate what happened in a more commonplace style.

4

The loss of Socrates left me in a condition that I can only describe as complete emotional and intellectual paralysis. It was not grief; it was not sorrow; it was as if the whole world was taken away at one stroke and I was left in a total vacuum, a vacuum that was within me as much as it surrounded me. When I left Athens as soon as I was partially recovered from the illness that had laid me down throughout the time that Socrates was in prison awaiting death, I was fleeing myself more than anything else. Indeed, I believe it was the will to flee that gave me the strength to get out of my sick-bed.

For a time I journeyed aimlessly from one city to another, from one country to another. I met people, some of them good friends, discussed things, gained experience, learned, but all the time feeling that my mind was not collected, my inner being was dissipated. Until one day, one benign summer day, sitting all by myself in a peaceful grove, not a thought but a desire, a mastering drive, took possession of me, no doubt sent by a gracious god. I would re-create the Socratic experience – I could not describe it by

any other words – in an imaginative dramatic piece, or dramatic pieces; why not? I sensed at once that in re-creating and re-living the Socratic discourses I would distil for myself the essence of Socrates' thought and Socrates' philosophy of life. I would re-discover Socrates and in re-discovering Socrates I would be discovering myself. I would re-possess my mind, gain clarity of outlook, become whole and regain my peace.

That was the inspiration as it first flashed in my mind. For a while I was elated; for a short time I knew such equanimity as I had not known since the day sentence was passed on Socrates. Then, for many days, many days and many nights, I was tossed into a whirlpool of agitated thought. How would I go about it? Now I was filled with enthusiasm; now I was dejected. I tried to recollect particular Socratic discussions I had attended during the preceding ten years or so, but I decided against trying to reproduce any such actual discussions. I would have to visualize a situation, put Socrates in the heart of it, and let him act and speak as Socrates and only Socrates would.

In more than ten years during which I associated with Socrates regularly, although every time I heard Socrates discoursing I had new insight and new understanding, I thought I had absorbed the fundamental framework of his thought, his general outlook, his firm convictions, his basic notions and principles. Yet as I worked on my dramatic productions I found all that

coming to me with a renewed freshness, as if a new source of light was opened up giving my thought added clarity and distinctness. All that I had understood or thought I had understood was given a new birth. So in what follows I will write of these thoughts as if I were then discovering them for the first time.

What came to me as no less a surprise than the revelatory virtue I found in the act of writing was how, as soon as I turned my mind to writing, my long-buried passion for dramatic composition took possession of me. Further I realized that had I not neglected the ambition of my early youth, I would probably have composed not tragedy but comedy. As soon as I set out in my mind the stage for the piece I was to write, I was fully engrossed in the imaginary situation, indeed I was possessed by the setting and by the *prosôpa* of the drama. That aspect of the work, except in its barest outline and rudiments, was not premeditated; it was as if a power beyond my control and beyond my ken dictated what I was writing. I now – perhaps only now – see that depicting the manners and the mannerisms, the faults and the foibles, even the incidental lapses of thought or speech, in great or small — all that also helps towards the understanding of our human reality and the understanding of oneself, this being the one true end of philosophizing.

However, in what I intend to write here I do not expect to say much about the drama aspect of

my writings. My main concern will be with the philosophical content.

5

In the earliest pieces I wrote, the philosophical discussion was always initiated by the standard Socratic quest for *auto to kalon*, to *hoshion*, etc. The interlocutor invariably failed to understand what was asked for and gave an instance of the quality in question. Socrates had to explain that what he was asking for was *to eidos* by virtue of which particular things have that quality. It is not that they were stupid, though some of them may have been. The fact is that Socrates had created for us the idea of an intelligible realm over and against the perceptible world. Socrates knew that the ideals of justice, of reasonableness, of amity, have their being in the human mind and only in the human mind. The particular instances we meet with in actual experience only become for us just, reasonable, amicable, and so on, by virtue of the ideas in our mind. And it is by having these ideas that we have our proper being as human beings; it is in the realm of these intelligibles that we are properly and truly human. When Socrates asked his interlocutor to consider, say, *auto to sophrosunê*, his purpose was to examine the pure idea that is in the mind, *to eidos*, as he designated it. The examination invariably proceeded to show that the *eidos* in question was not this and was not

that, could not be this and could not be that. I soon realized that Socrates knew all the time that the *eidos* not only could never be found in its purity and perfection in any actual exemplification, but that it also could never be caught, confined, exhausted in any formal description or linguistic formulation. I realized that the purpose of the examination was to free our understanding of misconceptions and acquired wrong associations and to lead the mind to realize that the reality of the idea can only be seen by beholding it in its nakedness as it had its birth in the mind. The whole purpose of the Socratic examination was to lead us to confess that we do not know what in truth cannot be known and in confessing our ignorance come to know our own mind.

When Socrates said that it is by justice that what is just is just, I took that to mean that it is by the idea of justice – an idea created in and by the mind – that things become just to us — not only appear to be but actually become just to us, not only be seen by us as just but are to us just. When a kite snatches and flies away with a hare hunted by a wolf, that is neither just nor unjust. But when a human being snatches what another has earned, that act is unjust to a human being that has come to know the standard of justice. In the world apart from the mind there is no meaning and no value. The intelligible realm in the mind actually constitutes, strictly and literally speaking, the

meaningful world in which we have our being as human beings.

Further, when Socrates, in his critical examination, shows that the idea of justice cannot be found in anything outside the mind, nor be reduced to other ideas, nor be encapsulated in any articulation of speech, his purpose is to lead us to see that it is the idea in the mind that is the real thing and that lends reality to things in the outer world, the perceptible world.

Socrates always confined his examinations to moral ideals and ideas. It was his firm conviction that it is in those ideals and only in those ideals that the whole meaning and the whole worth of human life reside. In time I came to see that not only moral understanding but all understanding comes from ideas that arise in the mind and have no being but in the mind. I came to see that the equal, the more and the less, the greater and the smaller, the before and the after, have no being in the world, and can only be perceived in the world by one that has in one's mind the *eidos* perceived in the thing thus perceived. Further on I saw that any thing we name is that specific thing for us only when we have the idea which we clothe in that name. I saw that Socrates' distinction of the intelligible and the perceptible realms had depths I did not grasp at first. The whole world as we encounter it in untutored experience has not a whit of meaning until things are clothed in ideas that arise in the mind and have no being but in the mind. The world outside the mind, apart from

the mind, is the world that Heraclitus saw thrown into ceaseless mutation, that Anaxagoras found all mixed together; it is only the mind with its ideas that turns it into a world of identifiable things and relations, a world in which there is here and there and consequently has place for place, in which there is before and after and consequently persists in time. And none of those ideas are in the world, none can be got from the world. The mind is the one source of all meaning, of all understanding, of all knowledge.

6

In the earliest dramas I composed, I sought to copy the manner and the method of Socrates' discourse. I hoped that my readers would live through a specimen of the enlightening experience that I enjoyed in attending Socrates' living discourse and equally in re-creating these discourses. I hoped that the readers of those dramas would gain and appropriate for themselves the insight that I had found there. To have tried to encapsulate that insight in a fixed theoretical form, I thought, would have merely superficialized the experience and turned it into an empty husk. I still think that I was not mistaken there, but I am saddened to have found that it is not given to many to see the light. Perhaps in time, slowly and through many generations, the light might spread and reach wider and wider circles. Else how can we have any hope that human beings will ever

live a life worthy of beings supposed to have for their characteristic property a mind that reasons, a mind which demands that life have meaning and value?

7

After some four or five years during which I produced a number of the dramatic pieces in which I sought to re-capture the manner and method of Socratic discourse, in the hope of recreating in readers the liberating, enlightening insight that Socrates stirred in his audience, a writing was brought to my attention, which Polycrates had composed against Socrates. I was grievously pained. I was not only offended by the injustice and the injury done to the noblest and wisest man that has ever been among us, but I was also dismayed by the failure of even supposedly intelligent persons to understand the true nature of Socrates' teaching and of his mission. I knew that to carry out a polemical debate with Polycrates would serve no purpose. My purpose was to vindicate and clarify what Socrates stood for and what he laboured all his life to do. I decided that the best way to do that was to reproduce Socrates' own statement of his purpose and his convictions during his trial. So I wrote my *Apologia Sôkratous*.

8

In over sixty years of my life, ever since I began associating regularly with Socrates, nothing baffled me so much as that things that were to Socrates, and to me following him, as clear and as unquestionable as that the whole is greater than the part were seen by others as puzzling and unbelievable. To Socrates our proper being as humans is our soul, understood as our inner life and inner reality; our sole good is the health of our soul; the whole meaning of our life, our whole worth, our whole dignity, is in preserving the health of our soul; to preserve the health of our soul is to live in the light of reason; to live in the light of reason is to know the true nature of our proper being, our reality, our sole good. These were not to Socrates distinct beliefs or distinct propositions; they were various expressions of one insight. To Socrates it was as evident as anything can ever be that to have this insight and to be good and to live and act virtuously are one and the same thing. When Socrates affirmed the identity of knowledge and virtue; when he said that one who knows what is good necessarily does what is good; when he said that one who knows the good will necessarily prefer being wronged to wronging others; when he said a good person must never injure another or return injury for injury, he was simply expressing variously that one insight. He did not seek to, or have to, prove any of that: what is self-evident is neither in need of, nor is

capable of, any proof. What he sought in his discourses was to lead us to have that insight by looking within ourselves, by awakening to our inner reality.

I say I was never in my life so much baffled as by seeing people failing to understand Socrates when he said that, refusing to believe that he seriously, candidly, and literally meant what he said. When I presented in my dramas Polus constrained to give hollow consent to Socrates' arguments without inner conviction, that was understandable because Polus was too much in the grip of the common notions of success and the false values of the populace; when I depicted Callicles radically and vehemently rejecting Socrates' statements I could picture that as understandable because Callicles had completely corrupted the good in him; when I made Thrasymachus unreceptive to Socrates' arguments I saw that too as understandable because Thrasymachus was even more than Polus under the sway of the false popular notions and values. I can find these cases understandable or at any rate explainable, but what I find perplexing is that persons of normal intelligence and common virtue find it difficult to accept Socrates' position as simply true without qualification. I think that Alcibiades had no such difficulty; he could understand Socrates and believe him. In one drama I made Alcibiades speak feelingly in praise of Socrates. I am convinced that Alcibiades was of a far nobler and more sensitive nature than any of

the three I have just named; I believe that the bad influence of society and the good influence of Socrates fought a raging battle within him, but he was more exposed to the bad than to the good. Euripides could have made a touching and enlightening tragedy of the promise and the downfall of that unfortunate man.

9

In my day I did not have first-hand acquaintance with the prominent figures of the first wave of journeying teachers who, one must confess, did much to advance the desire for learning in all of the Hellenic cities. I read of course the books of Protagoras of Abdera, in which I found much that was thought-provoking, and the books of Gorgias of Leontini, which are very good in their way. I often heard Socrates speak with appreciation – tempered perhaps with a whiff of irony – of Prodicus of Iulis. Of Hippias of Elis I heard many an amusing report from many quarters. Among the early pieces I wrote was the longer one of the two in which I made Socrates engage Hippias of Elis. I think I will have something to say of the second Hippias piece later on. I found in myself a mischievous fascination with the personality of Hippias and throughout the two *Hippias* pieces but especially in the longer one I was overpowered by the desire to make fun of him. It is a comedy as cruel as Aristophanes's most heartless parodies; I am half-ashamed of it

now, but the man seemed to ask for it himself. In him we can see how a mentally blunt person can yet be clever in the ways of the world. I could picture to myself how Socrates could have made sport of him. Even as a child I had known that Socrates' well-known examinations of reputed 'wise' men were quite a different thing from what we knew of him when he, lovingly, teasingly, quizzed us young boys. He must have known that those self-conceited 'great' men were themselves beyond reform; he wanted to show the common people that the men they looked to for guidance and leadership were bereft of understanding concerning the things that really mattered. But when he talked to us youngsters he wanted to help us think clearly, think for ourselves, and try to understand ourselves. I wanted to represent both these types of discourse. In the *Charmides* and the *Lysis* I dramatized what I had personally experienced in conversations with that matchless Silenus. In the *Euthydemus* I juxtaposed the two types. Anyhow, when writing the *Hippias* pieces, particularly in the first part of the longer one, I found myself drawn to making fun of the man, much more so than to pursuing the inquiry in a Socratic manner. I experienced this overpowering dramatic pull in many of the earlier pieces. In the *Laches* my focus was more on the characters of Laches and Nicias and the personalities of Lysimachus and Melesias than on the discussion of the nature of *andreia*. In fact I have to confess that there was much roguishness in my portrayal

of the bickering of the two good generals, so that that piece was more of a comedy than anything else.

10

It was in working on the *Charmides* and the *Euthyphro* but more so when working on the *Lysis* that I thought I sufficiently grasped the significance of the Socratic elenctic discourse. I had seen all through that the one purpose of the Socratic examination was to lead to self-examination and self-knowledge. I saw also that when the Socratic examination showed that the attempt to understand the meaning, the nature, of any particular virtue taken separately necessarily failed, that all virtues in fact merge into one another, that meant that human excellence is indeed one whole, one indivisible, unfragmentable thing; that that one thing which is one with human excellence is a wholesome soul; that the soul is identical with *nous*, and hence human excellence is none other than *phronêsis*, the life of active, unhampered, unencumbered reason. The Socratic examination aimed at disentangling, dismantling, sweeping away all the junk and clutter of inherited beliefs and presuppositions and false values, to enable us to look within ourselves where alone there is all reality and all value. All of that I had surmised fairly well from the start but there was another hidden significance that emerged distinctly as I

worked in particular on the *Lysis*. Not only are all moral values bound together in one whole and are falsified when fragmented, but all things, all the things of the perceptible world and all the ideas relating to things in the outer world, taken separately, are shards and fragments of one whole and can only be understood when seen in the whole. I suppose it was then that I came to see the One of Parmenides in a new light. And it was that new understanding of Parmenides that I enveloped in the dramatic piece that I named after the great man of Elea, whom I reverently referred to as Father Parmenides: that was no literary artifice; I could not speak of him otherwise. It was that insight that led me later on to maintain that to philosophize is to see the one in the many, raising to a new level the understanding of one intelligible form in multiple perceptible instances.

11

Aristotle came to join the Academy, as I recall, the year Dionysius the elder died. The Academy had been running for some twenty years. I saw at once that the lad was very intelligent and inquisitive. I was greatly pleased and had high hopes for him. But before long he began to exasperate me. What I saw as pure philosophical questions did not stir him. He was curious to know about things as they are in the outer world. But he was industrious and avid for

learning. He read every book he could lay his hands on. He read the dramatic pieces I had written before I became engrossed in my duties in the Academy, but his reading almost made me regret I had wasted time and energy on those works. Aristotle's lack of understanding of my early writings made me despair of achieving the end I had in view when I wrote those dramas. Perhaps his fault is that he takes things too seriously; he cannot see the humour in my writings, and that spoils everything. Above all I have been deeply insulted by his reading of the *Politeia*. I have been misunderstood by others of my associates too, but perhaps I am especially incensed by Aristotle because I had placed greater hopes on him.

12

I have often examined problems relating to correctness of thinking, how failing to distinguish and set apart different ways of approaching a question can lead us astray, how shifting between two different senses of a word without being aware of the difference can present us with unacceptable conclusions. I always thought that no special discipline is needed for avoiding such errors, that if we think unhurriedly, if we go over our thoughts again and again, especially when we reach a conclusion that we find inharmonious with others, then every person of normal intelligence can put things right. Aristotle thinks that by

collecting instances of such errors and corrections, systematizing them, and formulating rules of correctness, we can have a science of correct thinking. Aristotle has a strong penchant for systematization and for fixed rules. I feel that he will persist and may well end up with his dreamed-of science. That would be something good in itself but I fear that it would also involve a grave risk. When we have fixed formulas for correct thinking we might be tempted to expect those formulas themselves to produce correct conclusions. Formulas and rules are by their nature general, that is to say, they are outer moulds emptied of all content. When we think about a specific subject, we fill the mould with material which, by the very fact of its being specific and not general, will never exactly fit the mould. Our conclusions, good or bad, will be the product not of the mould but of the material filling of the mould and will come with all the imperfection and the corruption inherent in the material. We then run a double risk. First, thinking that the conclusion flows from the mould we credit it with a certainty and a finality that are not its due. Secondly, we are apt to rely overmuch on the mould, get into the habit of thinking in empty abstractions, and become oblivious to the living pulse of living things. If Aristotle realizes his dream and sets up his science of correct thinking he will have given to the world a mixed blessing that in the distant future may burden thinkers with grave dangers.

13

When I came to write the *Politeia* I had the strange experience of feeling that I was being controlled by the subject rather than controlling the subject. The work was developing within me, spontaneously, as if by a will of its own, rather than being developed by me. In a way, I had always had that experience when creating my imaginative dramas; it was in fact the same kind of experience that I had described poets and artists being subject to when producing their works under inspiration and not by art; but in the case of the *Politeia* the experience came with special force and vivacity. I had some years earlier felt that the pieces in which I represented the characteristic Socratic examination of a specific *eidos* were sufficient to evoke the insight they were meant to evoke. I then wrote other pieces to explore and develop some other ideas. But somehow – I cannot now revive in my mind the exact circumstance: perhaps it was some cursory discussion I was engaged in – I wanted to write yet another examination of a single *eidos*, this time of *dikaïosunê*. But as I was working on it and before I had come to the end of the discussion with Thrasymachus, all kinds of ideas were knocking in my head. Our earlier examinations of specific ideas had shown that we can never imprison an idea in a determinate body of thought and the present examination would necessarily have the

same outcome. (Thrasymachus in any case would not embrace Socrates' view of justice.) But why not try to present a picture of justice by showing it embodied in a model, the model of a just city? I made Socrates engage in the construction of such a model and I gave my fancy free rein in the construction. The task could not be carried out with Thrasymachus as interlocutor; he would constantly be raising objections and difficulties. It was also an opportunity for me to pay tribute to my brothers Adeimantus and Glaucon. When the model construction was nearing completion, the question kept pounding in my head: Can there ever be a truly just city, human nature being what it is? Socrates had wanted to make all people wise; if people once become wise, there would be justice, peace, and happiness overall. But it is too much to dream of that. Can there ever be a just society then? Perhaps if, and only if, such a society is under the governance of wisdom, whether it be embodied in one or more than one person. When I gave that answer, the only answer I could find satisfactory, that should have formed the conclusion of the work. But I found myself carried on by that current that had been driving me all along to consider the question: How can we foster in human beings such wisdom, which is true philosophy? And then I found myself engrossed in a piece of work that gave me the greatest felicity I have ever known in my life. In that part of the *Politeia* where I dealt with the nature of the philosopher and of philosophy I was in fact

sketching and simultaneously experiencing that ascent which in an earlier work I had described as leading from the particular to the general to the highest idea of all: in the *Politeia* the ascent led to the idea of the Good, which is the source and fount and ground of all reality, all life, all understanding, all value. But then somehow I found myself going on to continue the work by analyzing forms of society as pictorial models of diseased souls, then topping all that with a *muthos* of the afterlife. The one theme that ran through the whole work from beginning to end and gave it unity was the quest for the life most worthwhile for a human being to live.

14

For some time before beginning to write the *Politeia* I had been questioning myself: Is it only by writing these dramatic pieces that I can carry on the mission entrusted to us by Socrates? From time to time I turned in my mind the idea of establishing some regular fellowship for the study of philosophy, but did not pursue the thought in detail. As I came in the *Politeia* to outlining the education of the philosopher, I saw that that was what was needed, that was what I had to do. Euclides had set up his philosophical school at Megara and here in Athens Antisthenes had started his. But what I had in mind was something different. Euclides, Antisthenes, and others established schools because they believed they

had something to teach. I could not be forgetful of the life-mission of Socrates. Socrates unwaveringly and sincerely affirmed that he taught no one, taught nothing, had nothing to teach. His concern was to make everyone see that the only wisdom possible for a human being is to acknowledge his ignorance. I was convinced that that was the most valuable heirloom Socrates left us and it was that heirloom that I wanted to preserve and to pass on. I will not say I know nothing, for in some valid sense of the word I can say that there is much that I know, but I will say that all I know is nothing. In the school I meant to set up, all the best of the accumulated knowledge that the learned have given us would be taught and further developed and advanced. But that would not be the true purpose and aim of the school. The true purpose and true end of all those studies would be to make the student realize that there is no wisdom and no understanding in all that. The true purpose and true end would be to make the mind's eye turn inwards. The true purpose and true end would be to make the student realize that wisdom and understanding are only to be sought and only to be found within us. Hence I planned that in the school we would indeed study number and geometry, harmonics and astronomy, and all that can be made the subject of methodical study, but all of that would be the rough and arduous clambering out of the Cave: the crowning of all the labour would be to realize that our unquenchable thirst for

understanding can only be slaked at the fount within, that our ardent desire for wisdom can only be satisfied by seeking to know what we are and what we are for, in obedience to the Delphic injunction: *gnôthi sauton*.

15

My first recollection of Socrates goes back to when I was about five. He used to come to our house, invited by my stepfather Pyrilampes, though I think the first distinct emotional impress I received from him was about the age of seven when I somehow mysteriously felt the great power of goodness and goodwill in the man, to which I responded with that strange instinctual capacity with which animals sense amity or animosity in those that approach them. I think it was also Pyrilampes who introduced him to Aspasia. Much later when I began to associate regularly with Socrates I often heard him speak with tenderness and appreciation of Aspasia, and it was what Socrates said of that exceptional woman that opened my eyes to the unreasonableness of the position of women among us Hellenes. Surely it is irrational of any society to keep the higher abilities of half of its members locked up and unused. It was evident from individual instances not only in Hellas but also in other nations that when a female receives the same education, training, or experience as a male, she is equal to the male and may surpass the male. Even looking

at the poor slave girls that we employ as dancers and flute-players in our festivities, we can see how, by simply being exposed to open society, they show more intelligence than our free women whom we keep shut up in our houses. Hence I was thankful when opportunity offered for welcoming young women in the Academy. Phaedra and Electra who joined us not long ago are doing as good work as any of the young men.

16

While I had to admit that the more respectable among the Sophists did some good work both in their direct teaching and in their written works, there were aspects of their work – even of the more intelligent and well-intentioned among them, not to speak of the crop of half-witted and unprincipled imitators who were driven partly by vanity and partly by mean love of lucre – that I could only see as harmful. First, on the practical plane, in their teaching of rhetoric, the art of effective speaking, the avowed goal they set before their students was success, success defined simply in terms of the acquisition of power and wealth, to the total exclusion of any moral considerations. This was radically opposed to the position of Socrates for whom the sole aim and end of philosophical examination was the good of the soul in purely moral terms. Secondly, on the theoretical plane, the opposition between *phusis* and *nomos*, which, to my knowledge, was

first introduced by Protagoras, was, in my view, false and making for confused thinking. There is no hard and fast line separating *phusis* and *nomos*. Human conventions, laws, and principles, are both natural and unnatural in a sense. They are natural since they are naturally generated by human nature and human nature is part of nature. At the same time they are unnatural in the sense that they are what gives us our distinctive character as human beings and sets us apart from the other members of what is called the natural world. To postulate the separation of *phusis* and *nomos* with the implication – nay, the positive injunction – that we should follow the former rather than the latter leads to the neglect and abandonment of what is best in us, what gives us worth and dignity as human beings.

I wrote the *Gorgias* to emphasize the opposition between philosophical investigation which aims solely at the wellbeing of the soul and rhetoric which, as avowed by its professors, aimed at material and worldly success. I knew that the good old Gorgias, who was still alive and active when I wrote that piece, saw rhetoric as an art that is meant to be practised responsibly by good and law-abiding citizens but that, like any other art, can be put to bad use. So in my drama I let Gorgias put forward his point of view then leave the argument to the two more hardened younger men. I knew that Polus too would not flout all socially sanctioned conventions and values and I represented him accordingly. But I wanted to

show what the unreserved acceptance of the declared aim of rhetoric as defined by the common run of rhetoricians would lead to. So I made Callicles stop at nothing. I did not mean to make Socrates rebut Callicles's arguments. In fact they were not arguing; each was making a statement of his position. Those who say, as many have said, that the arguments in the *Gorgias* are weak have missed the point. My whole purpose was to display the ugliness of the rhetoricians' position when allowed to take its full run. This is not to deny the value of the art as developed by Gorgias and as further pursued by Lysias and Isocrates. Lately our Aristotle, with his fondness for systematization and the formulation of rules, has taken an interest in trying to establish a science of rhetoric. One day he may well make a valuable contribution in that direction.

Some years later when I came to write the *Protagoras* I did not have a single, straightforward purpose as in the case of the *Gorgias*. The *Protagoras* was to serve multiple purposes, chief among which was to reflect on the riddle of the teachability of virtue, which I had touched on in the *Meno*. But I have written enough for today. I am tired and I can only keep my eyes open with an effort. It is curious how our body, which drives us like a hard master in our youth, still lords it over us in our old age though in a different manner and with what a different smack! But I must really stop now.

17

I know that members of the Academy have been mooting among themselves the question of who is to head the Academy when I am gone. They are careful not to broach the subject when I am around for fear of hurting my feelings; and although from time to time I have spoken to them of my hopes for the Academy after my departure, yet I do not touch on the question of succession because I do not want to influence their choice. But I know that many of them look to Speusippus as the likely next head, perhaps because they know that Speusippus is like a son to me. Already they turn to him for resolving this or that problem of administration, to spare me the trouble. Had Theaetetus lived or had Eudemus or our Socrates still been living, things would have been different.

I also know that on occasions when members discussed the succession, Aristotle felt himself wronged. Aristotle clearly sees himself as my natural successor for presiding over the Academy. But for myself, although I am careful not to show it, I would not be happy to see the Academy put in his hands. He is no doubt one of the brightest young men in our fellowship. But he is not endowed with the contemplative spirit. He is too much attached to the concrete, the particular, the perceptible. His inquisitiveness has more of curiosity than wonder. When in the *Politeia* I wrote of those lovers of sights and sounds who run about at the Dionysia, eager to catch every single

performance in town or country, that was perhaps some twenty years before Aristotle came to join my associates, and I certainly had in mind a more frivolous type than the son of Nicomachus, but since he came to us he has often caused that passage to come back to my mind. Moreover, he is not a mathematician. Speusippus too is not much of a mathematician, but still it is not personal affection that makes me prefer Speusippus to Aristotle. I believe that Speusippus is more likely to keep the studies in the Academy on the right track.

I was a lad when my sister Potone gave birth to Speusippus. I saw him grow up; I sat him on my lap and never wearied of looking into his baby eyes and wondering what thoughts, what sense of realities lost to us, lay behind that gleeful glitter; as a toddler I fondled him and often put him to sleep carrying him to my shoulder and strolling about till he slept; when he was a little older I watched him play and his joy was my joy. I cannot deny that I have always been particularly fond of Speusippus. Were I to make the choice of my successor in the Academy I might have felt uncertain whether my preference for Speusippus was not dictated by parental affection. I am glad that the choice resides with the members.

18

When discussing this or that subject, say astronomy, in the Academy, Aristotle has a habit

of asserting that we have to ascertain the facts, to keep an eye on the facts, to stick to the facts. I see something jejune in this insistence. I challenge anyone to point out a fact that gives us the meaning of fact. The notion of a fact is an intellectual construct and is involved in interminable intricacies. When I was a child of about six and went out to play with my comrades on a windy day, I saw the tree-tops waving and felt the wind blowing. It was evident that the trees by fanning caused the current of air that I felt, but I always wondered what caused the trees to wave in the first place. That was a mistake but it definitely was not erroneous thinking. I reasoned logically – and little children do reason logically – from good perceptible evidence. It is the same with the perceptible movements of the sun and the stars and the errant stars. The facts are what the ideal pattern in which we range the perceptible makes out to be facts. Down to whatever level of perception you go, the perception is always an interpretation that receives its meaning and its supposed factuality from an idea provided by the mind. That is what I meant when I said in the *Politeia* that in studying astronomy we should treat the subject as setting us problems for solution, just as geometry does. That is also why in the *Politeia* I place all knowledge relating to perceptible things in the lower section of the upper division of the divided line and consider it to be more akin to opinion than to true knowledge.

19

The other day I asked Philippus of Opus to take down a roll of Herodotus's *Historia* and read me the account of the battle of Marathon. Socrates grew up, went through the experiences of childhood, boyhood, and early youth, when the tales of such heroic deeds and soul-lifting victories were heard not from books but from persons who had shared in them and lived through them. Socrates grew up when Athens breathed euphoria, he could not but grow up loving and revering Athens as one loves one's mother and reveres one's father; all the corruption, the stupidities, the defeats, and the calamities that followed and that moulded the attitudes and the sentiments of my generation could not wipe off that love and that reverence from the heart of Socrates. He saw clearly the faults of the Athenian system and criticized bitingly the evils of Athenian society, but the optimism of his youth and the sentiments of his youth remained in his heart. When I wrote the *Crito* there were two things I wanted to bring out clearly. For in Socrates' attitude throughout the whole affair of his trial and what followed I could see two elements going side by side. In the first place there were his deep moral convictions which were the very substance and essence of his philosophy and his outlook on life. This is what I put in the first and shorter section of the piece, in the interchange with Crito. But there was also

Socrates' implicit submission to the law and patriotic deference to the city. This I put in the second imaginary section, personifying the Laws, making them argue their own case rhetorically. Crito had in fact all through been acting in consultation with us, all the close friends of Socrates, and had kept us informed of his attempts. He told us of his repeated endeavours to make Socrates yield and of Socrates' unwavering refusal, but did not report what was said in detail as there was no need for him to do that. When I wrote my piece I could easily place myself in the position of the good old Crito. In the earlier part I made him consent docilely to Socrates' moral arguments because he knew full well what those principles and convictions were for Socrates. In the second part he was silenced by the rhetorical argument because he too shared with Socrates the same sentiments and attitudes of their common early experiences. To me the *Crito* has perhaps more dramatic truth than any other of my writings, and yet I have heard clever persons arguing that there is a contradiction between Socrates' filial submission to the city and his maintaining that in all his doings he would only follow the dictates of reason. Who of us is not full of contradictions?

20

Socrates never wearied of demonstrating in his elenctic examinations that no words, no

articulation of words, can give us possession of reality, of the inner essence of an idea. When he led an interlocutor to admit, for instance, that if *sophia* brings about the good, is the cause of the good; and if what brings about and what is brought about are not one thing but two, that the cause and what the cause causes are different; then *sophia* and the good are different; then *sophia* is not good and the good is not *sophia*, the interlocutor was meant to see that any idea taken as standing by itself breeds absurdities. This came out to me strongly as I wrote the *Lysis*, and it was then that the idea of the *Parmenides* took shape in my mind. But I let it brew slowly. Ideas for other dramatic pieces came and claimed priority. When I wrote the *Politeia* and said that true philosophy must constantly destroy its own fundamental assumptions, I thought that the time had come for writing the *Parmenides* and intended to start on it soon. But then I was also at the same time thinking of founding the Academy. I began my preparations for that project; busied myself with its execution; then became engrossed in the duties of organization, administration, and teaching. A number of years passed. When at last I put my hand to the work I felt that I had lost the knack for writing. In fact it was in later works that I slowly began to regain something of what I had lost. Anyway, I planned the *Parmenides* to consist of two parts, the first to re-affirm the lesson that the ideas of the intelligible realm, without which there is no understanding, no knowledge, and no

meaning anywhere, are yet not to be seen as final or sufficient unto themselves or as constituting a world apart. The second part was to reiterate the lesson by a detailed examination of the inseparability of the ideas of oneness and being. It was because, even as I was writing the *Lysis*, I wanted to put under a flood of light the ontological insight that all fragmentation of being is fraught with falsehood and corruption, that only what is whole has reality, that I thought of making the venerable Parmenides lead the discussion. Dramatic propriety then made it necessary to represent Socrates as a very young man. I made the discussion of the ideas in the first part turn around my own early speculations about expressing in some articulate form the connection between the intelligible ideas and particular instances to which they gave meaning. These were speculations that Socrates did not go into. For him the intelligible realm gave meaning and reality and worth to human life and to the world. That is and remains the living core of all philosophy.

21

I did not feel or think that I sacrificed much when I abandoned my literary work for some time after establishing the Academy. When I had finished the *Politeia* I knew that I had put in words all that can be put in words about philosophy and all that philosophy stands for. My task from that

point on, I thought, was to provide for those who attached themselves to my school the means that enable them to seek the Good and live in the light of the Good. The educational programme that I outlined in the *Politeia* would train their minds to think creatively and critically and, of far greater value, would fire their souls with the longing for the Good. Towards this second and more important goal only personal example and the atmosphere of a community devoted wholeheartedly to the ideal of a good life could help. Concerning the method of teaching, I decided that there would be two parallel paths. In the case of established *mathemata*, I and the more mature ones among my associates would help the younger students appropriate what has been achieved in those fields down to our time, and wherever there seemed to be scope for further advance, problems would be formulated for collective, cooperative investigation. That would be the one path. The second path, weightier in my consideration, would be daily live converse and discussion of questions of a more general and more fundamental character than those set for research in the particular *mathemata*.

So, after I set up the Academy, I thought it improbable that I should once again turn to writing dramatic pieces of the kind I had written before. But after the lapse of some years I began to think that I could use that mode of writing for furthering the examination of questions that had been raised in our Academic live discussions or

questions that suggested themselves to my mind. The purpose would always be to provoke thinking, to suggest avenues of investigation, to challenge certain fixed views, for I never wavered in my conviction that no valuable insight can ever be imprisoned in a final formulation of thought or – which is another way of saying the same thing – in a final linguistic articulation.

22

When I started writing my early dramatic pieces I knew that to try to recall and record discourses that Socrates had carried out in my presence would not only not be possible, but that even if it were possible, it would not serve my purpose. I wanted to evoke the spirit of the Socratic examination and to arouse in my readers, at least in the more receptive of them, the urge to self-examination that the living Socratic discourse aroused. But when I was moved by the vicious calumnies directed against Socrates by Polycrates and others who cared for near-sighted and narrow interests more than they cared for the truth; and when I decided to defend not only the memory of that most noble and good of men but even more to defend the truth itself; I knew that the best I could do was to reproduce Socrates' own explanation and defence of his lifework in the course of his trial; I then recalled what Thucydides had written at the beginning of his history of the Peloponnesian War about reporting

speeches, where he said that it was hard "to recollect the exact words", and that therefore he "put into the mouth of each speaker the sentiments proper to the occasion", while at the same time he endeavoured, as nearly as he could, "to give the general purport of what was actually said". I thought that that was wisely said by Thucydides and that I would follow his example.

23

Time and time again I have had to explain to students and readers of my writings that Socrates never was in quest of formal definitions neither was it my purpose when representing the examination of interlocutors by Socrates in my early writings to seek such definitions. Socrates tormented his interlocutors with his questions to make them see how foggy and confused their thinking was, to make them confess to themselves their own ignorance, to make them search themselves, to make them look within. What good could a good definition of *sôphrosunê* or *andreia* do anyone? I say a 'good definition' for that is all we can have at times for certain purposes; there is no such thing as 'a true definition', for the simple reason that words can never capture reality. It is true that I, for my part, have been intrigued by mathematical definitions and have sometimes tried to construct other definitions modelled on mathematical ones, but I knew those were special-purpose definitions,

designed to give guidance in specific practical fields. When I wrote the *Politeia* I worked representations of the separate virtues into the body of the model city. Those were not definitions that could stand a Socratic examination. Later still, my work in the Academy led me to look into methods of inquiry and investigation and I experimented with methods of classification and the separation of kinds. Aristotle has been intrigued with these. But all of this has nothing to do with the Socratic search, which I sought to represent in my early writings, at the core and heart of which was the clear realization that no virtue can be housed in terms foreign to that virtue; that no one virtue has meaning apart from all virtue; that no virtue has any meaning or being apart from understanding; that the only place and source of understanding is the inwardness of the mind. All of that, for Socrates, formed one integral whole, and all of that was gathered up in one insight: for all wisdom, all goodness, all wellbeing, look within you; within you is all *alêtheia* and all *ousia*.

24

In writing my early dramatic pieces I often felt I was the plaything of the Muse. I was moved to make a study of the characters and the situation and give that more attention than the subject proposed for discussion. For example, when I wrote the *Laches* I could have confessed to

myself that the examination of *andreaia* was almost no more than an excuse for portraying the characters of Laches and Nicias about whom I had often heard Socrates speak with respect and appreciation. I also wanted to picture the characters of the aged Lysimachus and Melesias. In writing those early pieces I never lost sight of the purpose that impelled me in the first place to compose those dramas, namely, to keep alive the memory of Socrates and of his mission; to recall and re-live for myself the exhilarating experience of self-discovery that he had always ignited in me; hopefully, to make my readers share in the experience and the enlightenment. I never overlooked all that, but whenever I started writing, poetic madness was master.

25

Of all the wise men that preceded Socrates in time, there were two whose thought I found most enlightening — most enlightening perhaps precisely because most puzzling; they raise questions before which we stand for ever astounded, yearning for understanding, an understanding on the journey towards which we set out, seeing its beacon shining brightly, but knowing that we can never grasp it bodily. The first of these was Heraclitus. He revealed that the whole world, all that we see and touch and hear and sense and feel, all things are shadows that flit and mix and pass away. No wonder he saw the All

as an eternally self-consuming Fire. The second was Parmenides who taught that the real must be whole and abiding and intelligible and can only be one. From these two strands of thought and in the light of the Socratic insight into the oneness of intelligence and goodness, I wove for myself a vision, maybe a dream, but a dream that makes life worthwhile.

26

About the things of the outer world we can have knowledge that is definite, serviceable, and humanly reliable, but it is still knowledge about things that are themselves of spurious reality. The men in the Cave have such knowledge about the shadows thrown onto the wall of the cave, and all the things of the world are such shadows. We can have knowledge about the stars but in the wink of an eye, as I point my finger at a star, that star is no longer the star that it was. Hence in the *Politeia* I classed all knowledge about perceptible things as no more than useful belief and serviceable opinion. And even in the sphere of pure ideas, what do we know about what is right and what is wrong? All that we know, all that Socrates was confident about, is that our inner being, the living, reasoning principle within us, is our reality and our treasure and that its health is our true good and that whatever tarnishes it or harms it is our evil; that all else is ignorance and that the only wisdom possible to us human beings is to

know that apart from our knowledge of our inner reality we know nothing.

27

The Unlimited and the Limit – The limit is the condition of intelligibility. Equally it is the source of falsity. Hence all that is intelligible is necessarily riddled with contradictoriness. This is only another way of expressing the principle that underlies the *Parmenides*: Nothingness is a condition of all determinate existence; hence all existence involves contradictoriness, relativity, transitoriness, and falsity.

28

What makes the *anthrôpos metron* doctrine of Protagoras, though incontestably true, so fraught with error? Protagoras sets *phusis* and *nomos* in opposition, and he is basically right there too. *Nomos* is artificial, is man-made, is always arbitrary, but it is precisely because it is humanly made that it is proper for humans; it is in virtue of the principles and maxims and rules that we make for ourselves that we have our properly human character. *Nomos* cannot be entirely free of the arbitrary element in it because its specific rulings have to be formulated in relation to changeable conditions. But beneath and beyond the arbitrary and relative formulations there are the absolute and lasting values of life and human dignity and

integrity. So also in the theoretical sphere, the Man the Measure dictum leads us astray when it makes us overlook that beyond the relativity of perception and particular judgement there are the principles of rationality and intellectual integrity and the intrinsic value of coherence which is the natural hue of inherent intelligence. Similarly, on a lower plane, social conventions, though arbitrary and in a sense irrational, are necessary for the cohesion of a human community, just as personal habits, however idiotic, are necessary for the smooth running of a person's ordinary goings and comings. In the same way, all language is arbitrary, but is indispensable for inter-personal communication; even on the level of science, *ad hoc* definitions and rules are needed. The arbitrary and relative does not negate the absolute; it is the indispensable but necessarily transient embodiment of the absolute. When the arbitrary and relative is taken as the whole we are no longer humans but things among things.

29

When I thought of writing the *Protagoras*, I wanted to do something on a Euripidean scale, and to do it even more richly than Euripides. The teaching of Protagoras, the thoughts of Protagoras, and the claims of Protagoras were a challenge to all that Socrates represented, and the man himself and those who went to him for betterment and the betterment they hoped to get at his hands

were a contrast to Socrates and those who longed to better their souls by associating with Socrates. All that was great matter for drama. The main thread in the texture of the drama had to be the problem of the teachability of virtue. The kind of virtue that Protagoras promised to deliver, whether it is a science or not, whether it is based on knowledge or not, could possibly somehow be taught as practical skills are taught. But virtue as understood by Socrates, the virtue that is the whole worth and dignity of a human being, can that be taught? The answer cannot be a simple affirmation or denial. To say it can is contradicted by the sorry plight of human society. To say it cannot dashes our hopes and dreams of ever having a good society and mocks our earnest efforts to bring up our children and guide our students to be good persons. Socrates always believed and affirmed that there is no virtue apart from understanding, but he always showed that that understanding is not like anything of what we commonly call knowledge. It was clear to him that the understanding that is one with virtue is the understanding of our true good; that our true good is nothing other than the health and the integrity of our inner reality, which he referred to simply as that in us which thrives by our doing what is right and withers by our doing what is wrong; and that that understanding is only to be found by looking into that inner reality. That inner reality was for Socrates the source of all understanding, all virtue, and all happiness. But to

find all of that within us all of that had to be there within us in the first place. For Socrates it was there. He did not find it necessary to stop to ask: how can we make sure that every person will find it within when that person looks within? In the *Politeia* and in the book which I have lately been working on but have temporarily put aside to record these reminiscences, I said that by nurturing little children in the beauty of song and feeding them beautiful fables and presenting to them in good poetry examples of noble deeds and noble characters, we can foster in them that inner wholesomeness. In the speech that I put in the mouth of Socrates when the friends celebrating at the house of Agathon took turns in praising *Erôs*, it was the pursuit of beauty that fed that inner reality. Not long ago when discussing the subject in the Academy one of my younger associates said that a mother's love and tenderness when nursing her baby, a father's affectionate care, the feelings of genial comradeship and mutual sympathy when children play together and develop genuine friendships, are the experiences which first nourish the soul and in time give substance to the literature depicting good deeds and good character. I thought that was wisely said. I began this note by speaking about what I had in mind when I thought of writing my *Protagoras* piece and have rambled far but perhaps not too far because all of that probably had been rumbling at the back of my mind at the same time and my intention was to make my readers examine by themselves

and for themselves all of that and yet many a superficial reader have been so clever as to find nothing in the whole piece but the glaring fault of my making Socrates contradict his known position on the teachability of virtue. But I have dictated more than enough for one day and I have other things to attend to and Philippus also has other things to attend to, so let this suffice for today.

30

Written texts, like oracles and dreams, are not there for us to find meaning in them or to take meaning out of them; they are given us that we may put meaning into them. Written texts, like oracles and dreams, do not speak to us; they invite us to speak out what is in us. This is the only wise use to which writings, oracles, and dreams may be put by anyone with sense. Into the vessel we pour our own wine: many a kingly goblet has been filled with stale wine: many an indifferent cup has been filled with godly nectar.

31

How I wish Aristotle understood by philosophy what I understand. Of all my associates he has probably the most penetrating intellect and, what is more important, he is foremost among those genuinely devoted to the life of thought. Others may have other goals but

Aristotle is wholly given to the pursuit of knowledge, but it is the kind of knowledge that in the *Politeia* I placed not under *nous*, but under the lower *dunamis* of *dianoia*. Aristotle is interested in the world of things — not lured by and engrossed in the world of things in the way lesser spirits are, but drawn to them by the inquisitiveness of a fervid mind. My problem with Aristotle is the problem Socrates found with Anaxagoras. Anaxagoras too was interested in the world of things, though, like his Ionian predecessors, he sought a theory of all things, while Aristotle just wants to find how things are in the world. But knowing how things are in the world does not give us understanding of what is of most import to us as human beings. That is what led Socrates to turn his back to the natural investigations of earlier thinkers. Socrates was the first to see clearly that the understanding of ourselves, of our values and our ideals, that understanding on which our true worth and true wellbeing depend, is totally distinct and separate from knowledge of how things are in the world. Philosophical understanding is distinct and separate even from the relatively pure study of arithmetic and geometry. In the *Politeia* and in practice in my school I found it necessary to make use of the study of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and harmonics to train the mind and prepare it for the study of pure ideas in themselves. For even these relatively pure theoretical studies are of no use philosophically if we stop at them. A philosopher

has to study the ideas we bring forth from our inmost being to shape the ideal world in which we have our true life as human beings. And a philosopher does not study those ideas to find out anything, but only and always to find the form of those ideas inadequate to the reality they mean to convey, the reality of that inmost being of the mind. This is what, in the *Politeia*, I called dialectic, that dialectic that I said must constantly destroy its own grounds, because it is in perpetually discovering the inadequacy of the form of our ideas to convey reality that we go back to our true inmost reality, the reality of the living, creative intelligence in us, the source of all good, all being, all understanding, which is yet itself beyond good and being and understanding, as I said in the *Politeia* where I named it The Form of the Good.

32

Somewhere I said that we put meaning into a written text as we put meaning into oracles and dreams. Even what the senses bring us remains destitute of meaning until we put meaning into it. And the meaning put by one person into the offerings of the senses may be different from the meaning put into them by another. There are no facts pure and simple. Fact is a fiction, a lie. Nothing exasperates me more than the misuse of the words *alêtheia* and *to on* in the writings of people who should know better. I never use these

words in my writings for things as they are in the world but only of what is intelligible. This is what I meant when I wrote somewhere that no *this* is intelligible except as a *what*.

33

Socrates could easily have found good usable definitions of the concepts he investigated. That would not have served his purpose. A practically good definition is a tool useful for a specifically determined purpose. It can not, never can, give understanding of the thing defined, never can give insight into the essence, the inner reality of a thing. In the Socratic investigation the search is the purpose and the end, not any outcome separate from, external to, or beyond the search itself. I have been trying to put that into the heads of my associates, especially Aristotle. The sample definitions I gave in the course of some of my writings and my attempts lately to construct definitions by the method of collection and division are a totally different thing. These are the tools useful for particular practical purposes in the fields of mathematics, natural science, and the arts. These are tools. In the course of using a tool, just as in the course of any other activity, one may suddenly be given an insight. This is not given by the tool but by the living activity of the mind using the tool. In how many ways must I repeat all this? Understanding is a spark of fire struck inwardly, spontaneously, in the mind, from the

mind, by the mind. There is no other source or other means of understanding.

34

Thucydides writing of the research work he carried out for verifying events recorded in his history of the Peloponnesian War says that different witnesses told different stories about the same events. This is an experience we often encounter in the course of daily life in connection with quite commonplace happenings. Quite trustworthy and unbiased eye-witnesses give different accounts of the same event attended by them. Objective observation is an ideal, or, rather, an impossible figment. To observe is to bring the observer's mind to bear on what is observed, and therefore necessarily to subject what is observed to the influence of what is in the observer's mind. What is said to be observed is a product, an amalgam, of the intake and the intaking mind; and the product, the amalgam, is a whole that cannot be separated into observed and observer without falsification. This is true of all reporting and all interpretation on all levels, from what we naively take as the evidence of our senses, to the interpretation of historical evidence, to the understanding of a philosophical text. And this is the kernel of truth in the doctrine of Protagoras maintaining that man is the measure of all things and this also sets the limit to the truth of the doctrine of Protagoras.

The boundaries of objective truth are the practical boundaries of what Thucydides calls human probability. To touch *alêtheia*, to commune with the real that is above and beyond all that is actual, that is above and beyond all that is in the outer world, the mind has to transcend the sphere where man is the measure. That is the final message of the *Theaetetus*.

35

I am always exasperated by people who discuss the fantastic Kallipolis I constructed in the *Politeia* as if they were examining the draft of a constitution actually proposed for a new colony to be established. My imaginary constitution in the *Politeia* was an Aesop's fable. Now a person who hears Aesop's tale of the fox that couldn't reach the bunch of grapes and cried, "They are sour", and then, instead of either grasping the moral clothed in the story or else simply enjoying the tale with the naïve hospitableness of a child's imagination, goes on in all seriousness to assert that in his experience he never found foxes eating grapes, or cleverly proposing means by which the fox, if he were wise enough, could have reached the grapes — such a person could be learned, adept in the ways of the world, endowed with a sharp intellect, but still I would deem him poor in insight, a drawback which far outweighs all the rest. That is how I see the majority of the most sophisticated critics of my Kallipolis. Even in the

case of my latest book which I have neglected since I busied myself with writing this series of reflections and which in fact I hoped would prove a source of enlightenment and inspiration to actual lawgivers, I would consider him a veritable fool who took its proposals as they stand and tried to apply them to an actual city. A system of laws devised in the ethereal isolation of pure thought can only give veiled intimations of basic principles. Legislation for an actual state embodies the principles in formulations dictated by the contingences of determinate time and determinate place. That may be said of my *Nomoi*, but in the case of the *Politeia*, what I had first and foremost in my mind was to intimate a vision of the good life, the life of true virtue, presented in an elaborate simile, which perhaps through enthusiasm I was driven to make over-elaborate.

36

Pericles son of Xanthippus, in his famed funeral speech which Thucydides preserved for us and for coming generations, extolled 'our fathers', fathers of the Athenians of his generation, because they had added to their inheritance the empire which he saw as a great achievement and a blessing. But what good did the empire do the Athenians? Were not all the miseries that the Athenians suffered during the Peloponnesian War and the final humiliation to which they were subjected a direct result of the pomp and pride

that the empire bred in them? When I made Socrates say in the *Gorgias* and elsewhere that there is hardly one of our celebrated political leaders that can be regarded as a wise statesman, many people saw that as an injustice. What good do glory and power and riches, in themselves, bring the citizens of a state? I was not jesting when I affirmed on more than one occasion that the only good a wise statesman can do his citizens is to make them good and wise. I was speaking in full earnest and in all sincerity. Yet some persons have found a contradiction between my saying this and my picturing the statesman in the *Politicus* as weaving the web of state from the threads and yarns at his disposal. What narrow-mindedness and lack of vision! A statesman's first and highest duty is to see that the citizens become good and wise; but the statesman has to organize a state and make it run smoothly; to do this he has to weave the talents, abilities, potentialities, and powers available to him in a harmonious and consistent fabric. Those who see a contradiction here expect the whole truth about all aspects of everything in the world to be entrapped in a single statement of so many words. They do not understand that the truth about anything, if it is ever given to humans to attain to the truth about anything, can only be glimpsed in a texture woven of many threads and yarns into some harmonious whole, that at best intimates from afar the reality beyond all being and all truth, the

one reality of the seeking mind, of creative intelligence.

37

Once when I had occasion to recall the funeral oration of Pericles as set down by Thucydides, with all its vacuous bombast and vainglorious bragging, I was so filled with revulsion that I felt impelled to lampoon it, so I wrote the *Menexenus*. I thought that in the introductory conversation between Socrates and Menexenus I made my intention very clear. In the composition of the oration itself, that intention had of course to be veiled; still I thought I hinted sufficiently at the folly and futility of all war. In the *Phaedo* I identified vicious bodily desires and bodily needs as a source of wars; in the *Politeia* I described the simple city which satisfies solely the basic needs of its indwellers as healthy; and in the latest book which I still have to go over to put into final shape, I indicated that a wise lawgiver, in setting up a new city, should see to it that the city does not become very powerful or very rich, that she may neither be tempted to covet the riches of her neighbours nor herself tempt her neighbours to covet her own riches. I am convinced that the power and wealth attained by Athens under the direction of Pericles were the source of more evil than good and that in his funeral oration Pericles was vaunting what it were wiser to rue. Of course power and wealth are

relative things; it is not a city's wealth in itself that leads to war; but when one city has more wealth than her neighbour, the more wealthy seeks to be wealthier still by appropriating what belongs to the poorer, and the poorer seeks to get for herself what is possessed by the richer. I am moved to prophecy; here is the oracle I leave to those that come after me: The peoples of the world will not enjoy peace and tranquillity and will not be able to attend properly to the true goods of the soul until all human communities live in conditions equally well-ordered, equally comfortable, equally enlightened.

38

Hermodius and Hippocrates are, apart from Aristotle, the most argumentative and argument-loving members of the school. If I live to continue these memoirs for some time, I believe I will be mentioning them repeatedly. Hermodius is our youngest member; he only came to us two years ago and is not twenty yet. Hardly a couple of months after his arrival, as soon as he overcame the shyness and timidity of the newcomer and felt at home in the atmosphere of freedom and openness that is the hallmark of discussions in the school, he began to raise questions and express views that caused me to review positions of mine that I had never before thought were open to question and to experience uncertainty about convictions I had long felt were secure. I think

that, had he come into my life when I was much younger, I would probably have thought differently on many subjects. Hippocrates came to the Academy while I was away in Sicily on my last visit there, just as Aristotle had come during my earlier absence in Syracuse. Here I am once again connecting these two young men with the son of Nicomachus. These three in fact, although every one of them is different from the other two, especially Hermodius, who is not only different but is in character and mode of thinking quite opposed to the other two, yet all three have this in common, that they are the ones that cause the greatest intellectual turbulence in the Academy.

39

Some people have found a contradiction between what is said in the *Gorgias* and what is said in the *Protagoras* about pleasure and some have contrasted both these with the *Philebus*. This is the eristic habit of mind that expects an argument, any argument, to give the whole truth, the final truth, about anything, and give their minds licence to sleep for the duration of their lives. This is the frame of mind that corrupted the meaning of argument and gave a bad name to dialectic so that our Aristotle insists on binding the term dialectic with sophistic refutations. An argument is a genuine exercise of *phronêsis* so long as it remains a live search, an examination, of one's own thought, but it is corrupted when it

turns into a tool for producing a final conclusion. A genuine argument is an ingenuous — I am at a loss for a word, let us say an ingenuous conversation, I will not say in but with a particular situation. In the *Gorgias* my Socrates argues with Callicles for whom pleasure is the goal and end of all striving. That is a dehumanizing attitude even if only the best and most refined pleasures were intended. In the *Protagoras* I make Socrates take pleasure as a token for a goal to be reached, to show that all human endeavour, whatever its goal may be, is an impossibility if divorced of intelligence.

I have been asked if, in writing the *Gorgias* my intention was to discuss the subject of oratory. My answer is that all my writings have been a search for the meaning and purpose of life. All my writings and all of my life-work were a continuation of Socrates' life mission, to exhort everyone, young and old, to pursue virtue, to see the health of their soul as their only good, that is, in short, to practise philosophy, that is, to live philosophically.

40

Perhaps in writing the *Menexenus* my intention was to satirize the boastful statements of Pericles in the funeral speech as reported by Thucydides. Perhaps; after all this time it is difficult to feel sure about what were my feelings and my intentions at the time. I am not now the

man that I was then. What I have written is preserved. I read it as others read it. As I read it now that I am so old, does it conjure up in my mind the same thoughts, the same sentiments, that were in my mind when I was writing it? That is very unlikely; strictly speaking it is impossible; but something remains, with some things the change is negligible; but we can never live again what we lived before. I fear I am doting; this is not what I meant to write now.

I say perhaps my intention was to satirize the boastful statements of Pericles. Pericles surely entertained vainglorious dreams, whether for himself or for Athens comes to the same thing. He identified himself with the city or identified the city with himself. He wanted to build a rich and powerful empire over which Athens would be mistress. What good could that do Athens? Even if we did not know the adverse course events later on took; even if we did not know that the might of the Athenian Empire in fact led to the downfall and the ruin and the humiliation of the city; even if it had remained powerful and prosperous, what good could it do the men and women and children of Athens, for as it has truly been said, it is men that make a city, not walls or ships. What good does a rich and powerful city do its citizens if it does not in the first place make them wise and good?

Now I hear some people saying that the King of Macedon means to build an empire on a scale never heard of before. It may be that he can

extend his power over all of the Hellenic cities and beyond. That may be possible. There may come a time in a far-away future – now from doting I am shifting to prophesying – when the conditions of life become such as to make it necessary for all human beings in all regions of the Earth to live in one state. That in itself would be neither a good thing nor a bad thing. Whether that gigantic state be rich or poor, whether its denizens live in comfort and pleasure or in hardship and drudgery, that in itself would not make it good or bad. Unless all the denizens of the One-Earth state are wise and good; unless they all value nothing above the inner treasure of a wholesome soul; unless they value justice and reasonableness and friendliness and beauty and intelligence above all treasures that are perceptible to the senses; unless all the citizens, the individual men and women, are wise and good, then that would be a miserable state. If they are wise and good, then whether their material goods be plentiful and their life be easy and pleasant or whether their material goods be scant and their life hard and full of toil, they will be happy and their life worthwhile and when they die they will go to their final rest satisfied.

The writing of this note – though I am only dictating – has exhausted me and I must get up and take a stroll to refresh my spirits.

41

More than once I asked Chaerephon about the oracle concerning Socrates. I also asked Socrates and was several times present when others asked him about it. Socrates was not inclined to dwell on that event and when asked about it would speak about the hotheadedness and 'madness' of Chaerephon. At his trial Socrates was obliged to mention the oracle to explain his God-imposed life mission. When I wrote the *Apologia Sôkratous* perhaps I dramatized that episode somewhat. From Chaerephon I had received the most coherent account.

Before Chaerephon had the impulse to put the question to the oracle Socrates was in the habit of meeting regularly with a small group of friends, many of them quite young, who delighted in intelligent conversation. They shared and studied together what reached them of the writings and sayings of the wise and they discussed public affairs and the conundrums that life never ceases to thrust on any thinking person. The *archê* of Socrates' approach to all of these questions was, as Chaerephon said, that the ideas born in the mind are what constitutes the world in which we have our special human being. Above all it is the moral ideas, the ideas of justice and reasonableness and modesty and honour and so on, that make us human and give our being all the meaning and worth it has. Those ideas are distinct

from all that we see and touch and handle in our contact with the world around us.

It was at that time, Chaerephon said, that Socrates read the book of Anaxagoras that led him to see that the distinction between intelligible ideas and sensible things is of profounder meaning and implications than seems at first. The investigation of things in the sensible world and the examination of ideas in the mind are two totally distinct activities, moving in two distinct realms, proceeding by different methods and in different ways, and the results obtained in the one can have no connection with or effect on the other. The investigation of the sensible world cannot answer questions raised in the realm of pure ideas and it was with these latter that Socrates was wholly concerned. To philosophize meant for Socrates to examine the ideas born in the mind and to be found nowhere but in the mind. The investigation of the outer world, without denying its value, he left to others. I tried to indicate this when in the *Phaedo* I put into the mouth of Socrates an account of how he had found it necessary to renounce the investigation of things and confine himself to the examination of ideas. It was also this that led me in the *Politeia* to draw the line between the study of pure ideas in themselves and the investigation of sensible things even though this investigation can only be carried out through ideas produced by the mind. The first of these is philosophy and yields understanding while the other we may call

science and it gives empirical knowledge. These two areas together cover the whole of *epistêmê* in one sense of the word. Below that I placed opinion and below that illusion.

I go back to the account of Chaerephon. The entire group of friends associating with Socrates, while admiring his penetrating intellect, were far more captivated by his character. When Socrates affirmed that the ideas of justice and reasonableness and probity and the like are what makes us human; that we can have no higher or more important business in life than to care for that inner shrine within us where we find these ideals; that truly to understand this constitutes the proper excellence of a human being; that to understand this is necessarily to be good — when Socrates said these things no one felt that these were thoughts or theoretical statements that were to be examined or proved or disproved; they were an outflow of his own inner nature. Chaerephon felt that there is no wisdom greater than to have this understanding as a person's very inner reality. Chaerephon was possessed with the idea that if the god were asked he would confirm this; he felt he had to undertake the journey to Delphi and put the question to the god.

When Chaerephon reported the oracle Socrates, as I gathered, was amused. He said, "What could the god mean by that? Surely there must be some hidden meaning to the oracle." For a while he did not seem to give the matter any further thought. But over the following few days

Chaerephon and the others observed that from time to time Socrates distanced himself from their common discussion and seemed to drown in thoughts of his own. Then one day someone brought up the question of the oracle. Socrates said, "I have been thinking and I seem to have found the answer to the riddle. The god probably wants to indicate that all the knowledge of which human beings pride themselves is as nothing and that there is no wisdom except in seeking to follow the Delphic injunction to know ourselves. It is only in seeking to understand our proper good that we approach wisdom. And I think I detect in the oracle not only a baring of our vain conceit of knowledge and a rebuke for our neglect of what should be our prime concern, but I also seem to detect a command intended for me personally to go help others free themselves from the false conceit of knowledge and to seek that understanding of themselves and of their inner reality which alone constitutes their proper excellence as human beings." After that, Chaerephon said, Socrates tended to give less time to discussion with the small group of his close friends and to devote more time to conversing with persons outside that intimate circle. The persons with whom he conversed in that way fell mainly into two classes. There were the young whom he hoped to lead to look within themselves where they could find their true good. There were also those persons who were thought by others and thought themselves to be powerful

and great and wise; he hoped to chasten their vanity and shake their over-confidence in their own wisdom and their power, for those faults not only damaged the soul within but also could cause great harm to the state.

42

The devastating plague that hit Athens in the second year of the Peloponnesian War occurred three years before I was born. By the time I was old enough to understand what was spoken, people had forgotten about that dreadful experience or did not want to recall it. Moreover, there were more immediate concerns to engage the minds of the Athenians. So I don't remember having heard much about the plague in my boyhood and early youth. When many years later I read the picturesque description of that calamity in the history of Thucydides, for a while that shook my faith in all things human. It made me see that more tragic even than the frailty of the physical constitution of human beings is the frailty of their moral constitution. In conditions such as those that prevailed during the plague, only a very exceptional human being, a demigod indeed, could preserve his or her humanity. Here and there one in a myriad souls might soar high and turn the foul condition into an occasion for heroic virtue. But all normal human beings, so to speak, under such conditions sink below the level of beasts in their spiritual state and in their

behaviour. Like the tender shoots of an exotic plant, normal human beings need a carefully arranged and carefully guarded ambience to attain and to maintain the proper virtue of a human being. Even under favourable conditions, the best of human individuals do not at all times and in all situations live up to the ideal. What hope can we have that there should ever be a community of human beings good and wise and as happy as it is possible for human beings to be? Only if all human communities on the earth establish arrangements that secure a peaceful, equitable, and comfortable life for all members, and only if such arrangements last long enough for all humans to attain their proper moral, spiritual, and intellectual maturity, can that dream come to fulfillment. Is it reasonable even to dream such a dream? But without this dream, would it be worthwhile to live?

I have here spoken of human beings and human communities as a whole. In the book that I have lately concluded but have yet to put in its final shape I have sought to draw a model for a reasonably good city. That is the limit of our present possibilities. But my reflections have convinced me that not even a perfect constitution – if perfection were possible in anything human – can guarantee the continuance of a good state surrounded by states that are not equally good. No one good state can exist and continue to be except when all other states are good.

43

Heraclitus taught us that all things in the sensible world are always fleeting; a thing of the sensible world has no share in being, it never is, it is always becoming what it is not. Pythagoras saw that in the series of odd and even numbers we find patterns and laws that are constant and never change. Why is that so? The series of numbers is a creation of the mind. It is formed by the mind on a simple principle. The simplicity of its *archê* is the *aitia*, the source and root and fount, of all the wonderful regularity and symmetry and infinite adaptability of the patterns and laws it engenders. And because the patterns and laws of numbers are a creation of the mind, the mind apprehends all things as shaped in the patterns and laws created by the mind. The forms – patterns and laws – generated by the mind and in which the mind apprehends all things, are independent of place and independent of time; are above place and above time; are eternal. I could see all this by following Pythagoras in his venture into the charmed world of number. Socrates saw that what determines and shapes our human life, what constitutes our characteristic life as humans, are the moral ideas that have no place and no source other than the mind. We live our special life as humans in a world constituted entirely by such ideas, whether whole and sound or deformed and corrupted. I saw that the whole meaning and worth of human life resided in such ideas. The

endless variations of human actions and human dealings are given meaning only by these ideas. Being creations of the mind they are, like arithmetical and geometrical forms, independent of place and time. They are, in an acceptable usage of the word, eternal. But I came to see that I was mistaken in assimilating unreservedly the moral ideas to the arithmetical forms. In my youthful enthusiasm I delighted in emphasizing the constancy and immutability of the moral ideas. I revelled in that language, which indeed conveyed a profound truth, even while I was absorbing the insight disclosed by Socrates' elenctic examinations, namely that the moral forms cannot be separated from one another and cannot be captured in any definite formulation. The very word *hôsautôs*, the humble phrase *hôsautôs echei*, came to have an air of sanctity about it in my writings. It was a mistake to give so much emphasis to the eternity of the particular forms; the eternity properly belongs to the creative intelligence that gives birth to the forms — not only the moral forms, but all forms that clothe the shapeless, chaotic, constantly fleeting and constantly changing appearances of the outer world. In the *Sophist* I tried to correct that undue emphasis, that unbridled enthusiasm, by insisting that mind cannot be separated from life, that activity is the essence of what is real, that it is an error to separate being and becoming.

44

What a rare thing it is to meet with a philosophical soul. I am almost driven to total despair. It is some forty years now since I started my school at the Academy. There has been a steady flow of students, all eager, all wanting to learn and to improve, all fairly intelligent and in possession of the necessary basic education. But how many true philosophers have been among them? Now and then there have been very promising ones, very bright ones who did very brilliant work in certain areas of study, such as Theaetetus, who was a remarkable person in more than one way. But how many genuine philosophical spirits do I find around me now? I cannot say that of any of the most advanced of my present associates. Neither Speusippus, nor Xenocrates, nor Aristotle has the true philosophical outlook, which is a way of thinking, a way of life, and an approach to life all in one.

When I give way to such despairing reflections I feel it almost as a betrayal to the spirit of Socrates. To the very end of his life, Socrates never gave up hopefully trying to help his interlocutors come to that gush of inner light that is true philosophy. He knew that philosophy cannot be taught; it is not a thing that can be infused into a mind from the outside; it is a power of vision, a living light under which the mind sees everything and considers everything under the Form of the Good. For Socrates to philosophize

and to be good was the same thing; to have the proper virtue of a human being and to philosophize was one thing.

I had not been oblivious of that when I started my work at the Academy. I hoped that through exercising the mind in pure study, through wholehearted devotion to learning, students would be led to that living fount of understanding. But what have I achieved for all my labour? I think that Socrates on that last day when he drank the deadly potion had around him a handful of souls that had seen the light. At least a handful among those present. I wish I could say the same of those who will be present when I depart.

45

There is not a single argument that cannot be overturned. The spoken words of an argument always have hidden in them unspoken qualifications necessary for the validity of the argument. These unspoken qualifications when brought to light are found to imply negation as much as affirmation. This is a necessity of thought. Thought can only capture a fragment of reality at any one time and to probe that fragment it must further fragment the fragment. The understanding gained in the process of thought is a spark that only gives light when caught in the living process. When fixed and static, the falsity inherent in the essential nature of thinking

dominates. This is the insight that I found in the Socratic elenchus and that I tried to intimate when I wrote the *Parmenides*.

There is not a single argument that cannot be overturned. But a counter-argument that does no more than overturn an opposed argument is a merely negative and paltry thing. That is eristic. An argument has to be re-examined to disclose the unspoken qualifications and the implied negations hidden in its terms, and it little matters whether the re-examination ends in a re-affirmation of the earlier conclusion or in a seemingly opposed conclusion. That is dialectic. And the dialectic process knows no rest for the result of the re-examination must in turn be subjected to re-examination.

Hence I am irritated by students and readers who find a later writing of mine contradicting an earlier one or who think that if they find a later writing correcting, so to say, an earlier, then one of these, they think, is shown to be true and the other false. Such students or readers are thinking eristically and gain nothing. To gain understanding their aim must be not to pluck a conclusion from this or that argument or piece of writing but to use the argument or the writing for exercising their own thought and exploring their own mind. A writing which teaches you something enslaves your mind. Only when you recognize the essential and ineradicable ambiguity and insufficiency of the written or spoken text and then put into it original meaning drawn from

within you, only then can a piece of written or spoken discourse help you gain understanding.

I have been writing under inspiration. May it please the gods that the writings I leave behind me be not instruments of enslavement but aids to freedom.

46

In my dramatic pieces the phrase *didonai logon* is repeatedly and variously used. That phrase is the hub of our studies and discussions at the Academy. Many students equate it with producing proof in the strict sense as in geometrical demonstration, although I never tire of telling them that in pure philosophy there is no conclusive proof and there are no final positions. In our wrestling with ultimate meanings and first principles, all we can do is to produce *muthoi* that give us assurance of the reality that we find within ourselves. Are our moral convictions then, the convictions for which we willingly give up everything, even life itself, are these moral convictions arbitrary? In a sense, in a very true sense, yes, though our moral convictions give expression to life-values we experience and identify with our proper reality and true worth.

Socrates found the proper reality and peculiar excellence of a human being in that within us which thrives and prospers by doing what is right and suffers by doing what is wrong, and that is our mind. He saw our well-being in the health of that

inner reality. That was a life-experience Socrates lived. It was for him a reality; it was his proper reality. All of Socrates' moral convictions, maxims, and tenets follow inevitably from that understanding. That understanding neither needed proof nor could be proved. When in the *Gorgias* Callicles refuses to accept Socrates' idea of the proper good of a human being, Socrates cannot win him over, whatever arguments he musters. Socrates' moral position is rational, together with all the maxims, principles, and judgements he derives from it, not because it can be proved or shown to be true, but because that position and maxims and principles are in harmony with his idea of what is good for a human being.

47

The virtue of philosophical thinking is not certainty or demonstrability or truth. The virtue of philosophical thinking is coherence and comprehensiveness: to be intrinsically consistent and harmonious and to comprehend as wide an area of the universe of thought as possible or be capable of being consistently and harmoniously related to as much of the content of our thought as possible — *to dunasthai logon didonai kai dechesthai* is that and nothing beside that. These two characters of coherence and comprehensiveness can be summed up in one character: wholeness. Philosophical reasoning

produces a vision that is whole in a double sense: a vision that is whole in the sense of being entire in itself, of having integrity, and is whole in the sense of extending or striving to extend over the whole sphere of our knowledge and our experience. That is what I had in mind when I wrote in the *Politeia*: *ho men gar sunoptikos dialektikos, ho de mê ou*. The wholeness of the philosophical vision is demanded by and issues from the integrity of the intelligent *psuchê*.

48

When I started writing my early Socratic dramatic pieces I hoped that in this way I would not only help keep the memory of that exceptional *daimôn* alive but would also be extending the special mission to which he had devoted the whole of his mature life. More directly, I hoped and felt that in re-enacting his elenctic examinations I would revive and consolidate in myself the insights that his association and conversation engendered and would refresh in myself the philosophical life that was his gift to his sincere and earnest adherents. And as Socrates used to say that in examining his interlocutors he was examining himself, I knew that in re-enacting those examinations I would be examining myself and turning my inner eye to that one reality and one source of all value that is within us.

In re-enacting the examinations I was confirmed in the understanding that Socrates never sought to inculcate any teaching or to lead his interlocutor to any fixed conclusion, but always to help his interlocutors find out for themselves that there is no knowledge and no understanding other than knowing their proper reality and to realize that that inner treasure is all that is real and all that is of true worth.

My early dramatic pieces were explorations of my reality and I hoped that they would be an incitement to others to discover and explore their own reality. Then a number of years passed during which the affairs of the Academy and other engagements kept me from writing. When once more I had the leisure and felt the urge to resume writing, I found myself exploring not my inner reality, at any rate not directly or principally, but various ideas and problems that suggested themselves in my reflections or in the course of our studies. These later works are dear to me as all work that is the child of thought and care is dear to its parent, but they add nothing to the insights that the early writings inspired in me and were meant to inspire in others.

I hope I may yet have time to say something more on those insights which I think to be of the highest value and which are the very soul of philosophy.

49

Socrates said that he did not teach anyone. In the sense in which he meant the words, that was perfectly true. The chief fault of Aeschines, Xenophon, and others who represented Socrates in their writings, particularly Antisthenes and Aristippus when dealing with moral questions, is that they tried to convey some positive teaching or to represent Socrates as giving a positive teaching. Naturally Socrates when conversing with simple persons or with young boys sometimes gave advice or pointed out moral lessons. But what he pursued in all earnestness as his life mission was to help his interlocutors to bring out into the open their received notions and evaluations and search and examine them in the light of their own minds. In all of his investigations of the meanings of virtues and common notions he did not seek to reach a verbal definition. In the course of the investigation a good verbal definition could be found and often was found but Socrates wanted his interlocutor to see that that does not give us the understanding we seek. The only aim and purpose of the Socratic examination was to make us wake up to the truth that our investigation was from first to last an examination of our own mind and that it is only within our own mind and only in understanding our own mind that we approach the understanding we seek. This is the insight that flickered in me while I associated with Socrates

and that became stronger and clearer when I relived the experience of the Socratic examination in re-enacting it in my dramatic pieces.

I too, following Socrates, say that I teach no one. Naturally in my work in the Academy I pass on *mathemata* to students and associates, I teach them techniques of investigation, I direct them to ways and train them in methods of examination. But all of these are a *propaideia*. All of these are of no more value than any external possession unless and until they ignite in the soul the spark that reveals our proper reality and shows wherein our true worth resides.

50

A truly divine quality in Socrates was his wholeness: he was a whole human being. His closest friends and most devoted admirers, while they could objectively see his diverse aspects, were capable of absorbing only this or that element, each according to his individual constitution. Aristippus ran away with the idea that pleasure in itself is good. Aeschines was content with the assertion of the value of conventional moral ideals. Antisthenes, in his moral thinking, focussed on the idea that our sole good is in our inner worth. I could ridicule Aristippus, Antisthenes, Aeschines, for grasping, each of them, only a fragment of Socrates' total outlook, but what of Plato son of Ariston? For years I busied myself with trying to find a satisfactory

formula for relating *ta eidê* to *ta aisthêta* which for Socrates were simply two sides of the world, and he was concerned only with the ideas in the mind because those ideas are our proper world as human beings. I was captivated by the problem of articulating the connection between those two sides. I knew it was an impossible task but for years I continued to be intrigued by the problem, until I purged myself of that insanity when I wrote the first part of the *Parmenides* in which I made Parmenides show that whatever formulation we devise we will find it riddled with contradictions and that what is important and necessary is to realize that without the ideas there can be no knowledge, no understanding, no humanity: for to be human is to live in the intelligible realm.

51

I asked Socrates one day what he felt when he watched Aristophanes' *Clouds* for the first time. He laughed, then said: "The rogue! But he did not make as much fun of me as I could have made myself." I asked him what truth there was in the representation of the *phrontistêrion* and the physical studies carried out there. He said, "By the time Aristophanes produced that comedy I had long since given up any physical study, not that I ever was actively engaged in physical investigation, but in my youth naturally I studied all I could lay my hands on of the works of the philosophers of nature. From the very first I did

not relate those studies to the problems which concerned me most, the problems of human life, how we can get and spread the understanding of what is of true value and recognize and discard what is mere show and deception. I did not expect to find answers to those problems in the works of the philosophers of nature but still I studied them with interest and kept puzzling over the problems of life and over the problems of the outer world without making a clear separation between them. But the book of Anaxagoras was in a different category. I studied the book, expecting it to help me in thinking about the problems of life. It was my shock at finding it of no help in that direction that made me see clearly that those two classes of questions belonged to and related to two completely distinct realms. I saw that our inner life and inner values, the truth or falsity of our aspirations, the goodness or baseness of our actions, could only be studied in and through the ideas within our minds, and that no study of the outer world could ever give us any understanding of our inner world. I saw that when seeking answers to questions relating to right and wrong and good and bad it is foolish to go to the outer world for answers. To understand ourselves there is nowhere to look but within ourselves."

52

When I found that the Socratic search, the pure, ingenuous desire for understanding,

courageously and unwaveringly pursued, with open eyes and open mind, takes us round and round, endlessly, it dawned on me that that endless, truly endless meandering, is not a blind wandering in a vicious maze, but is an introduction into the eternal where all is one and all is ever.

To define is to falsify, for all things share in all and all things enter in all. The Socratic *aporia* does not announce the failure of a quest but the entry into the boundless skies of understanding.

What is cause and what is outcome? When we separate these in determinate thought, in articulate speech, we create fictions. It is only when we chop off a part of living reality and empty it of the breath of life and drain it of its lifeblood that we can speak of a cause that is not outcome and an outcome that is not cause. In a living thing cause is outcome and outcome is cause. Beauty breeds love and love infuses beauty where no beauty was.

If we were pure intelligences we would see all things in one and see the one in all things. But we are finite beings and have to interact with finite things and therefore we have to break up the whole into fragments and create fictions so that in our finite life, with our finite minds, we may deal with the fragments that make up our finite world.

The Socratic *aporia* leads us back to the wholeness that is lost to us in the fictions that are necessary conditions under the contingences of our finite life.

53

Did I ever hold a doctrine of self-existent concepts or archetypes — my so-called Theory of Forms? I have often tried to dispel this misconception, or, better said, to clarify this confused notion. Since it persists among my closest associates, I must try once more to clarify not only my present position but also the true history of the whole thing. Let me begin by saying that the supposition I want to answer, as if I were answering a formal indictment, is two-sided, and I regard both sides as equally weighty. There is first the question of holding a doctrine, whatever doctrine it be, and there is secondly the substance of the doctrine.

First, how could I ever hold a doctrine when I have always insisted that the highest exercise of reason, the *noêsis* that proceeds from pure ideas, through pure ideas, to pure ideas, must always be and can never be anything but the unfolding of the entailments of initial suppositions, suppositions that must always be subjected to dialectical questioning and as it were destroyed? There is no end, no final stage, to that process. In practical matters we have to accept certain so-called facts to guide action. In astronomy we admit certain suppositions that for the time being, as we say, save the appearances satisfactorily. In mathematics we proceed from axioms and definitions that may long seem unshakeable but

that may conceivably be questioned by an intelligence that creatively engenders an alternative system of axioms and definitions. In the highest philosophy we weave visions, formulate principles, proclaim ideals, generate values, indeed create an ideal world that gives us fulness of life and makes of the dumb presentations of our senses a meaningful and articulate world, but an ideal world the substance of which nevertheless is all myth and fairy-tale stuff, and must be acknowledged as such if it is not to degenerate into mind-enslaving falsehood and superstition. I thought I had made that clear in saying that dialectics must always destroy its presuppositions and in insisting that the profoundest philosophical insight cannot be enclosed in any determinate formulation of thought or language.

Now to the substance of my so-called doctrine or theory of forms. I learned from that truly divine person, the son of Sophroniscus, that the ideas that have their being in the mind and nowhere but in the mind, the ideas of justice and reasonableness and courage and beauty, are what gives human life the distinctive character of human life, and the ideas of unity and equality and largeness and smallness, and the ideas of number and circle and triangle are what gives us a life of thought above and beyond the simple animal life of impulse and reaction. These ideas are distinct from, can be clearly distinguished from, our perceptible impressions and the things

that give us our perceptible impressions. Further on I reflected that those perceptible impressions themselves remain without meaning until we clothe them in the ideas of white and black, high-pitched and low-pitched, and even the ideas of a tree, a pebble, a star. It is by these ideas that we think things and not merely sense them. Then for a time I was intrigued by the problem of how to describe and how to express the connection between the ideas and the things in the perceptible world. The ideas of perceptible things, although they come from the mind – it is foolish to think that they are deposited by the things in the mind; they would then be duplicate impressions, still without meaning – they are incited, occasioned, by the things. The pure ideas, the ideas of values, numbers, and so on, are further removed from the things of the perceptible world but still they always relate to instances that are part of the world. The problem of the connection between the idea and the thing is a pseudo-problem; that is why it can never have a satisfactory solution. The just act is just because it is seen under the idea of justice, and the idea of justice is present in thought only when applied to a just act, present or represented as possible. The equal sticks are equal and are sticks in virtue of the idea equal and the idea stick. And the idea equal and the idea stick are present in thought only when applied to equal sticks, actual or imagined. The idea and the thing are distinct and must be distinguished but cannot be found

separately. Sight and the thing seen are distinct but the thing is not visible apart from sight and sight is not sight without a thing seen. Because the realm of ideas is the locus of intelligent life, the abode of values, the fount of all meaning, I was driven to give poetic expression to all that in the *Phaedrus* and in the speech of Socrates in the *Symposium*. In the *Parmenides*, where the central principle is the inescapable limitation of thought, I devoted the first part to showing the futility of trying to capture the connection between the idea and the thing in a fixed formulation and at the same time made Parmenides affirm emphatically that without the ideas there can be no thinking and no knowledge.

If you still find all of this unconvincing, unsatisfying, I will say, how could it be convincing or satisfying in the light of what I said about the impossibility of there being a finally satisfactory doctrine or theory? God forbid that I ever give reader or student final satisfaction. For as long as God permits me still to breathe, may I send reader and student on an endless journey of exploration within their inner reality.

54

In an elenctic examination Socrates sometimes advances – I am speaking of Socrates in my dramatic pieces as much as of Socrates as I knew him – a shaky argument or presents a limping objection simply to move the discussion

to some new area, to open up a new perspective. This is not trickery. In the *Charmides* the boy proposes to identify *sôphrosunê* with *aidôs*. Socrates quotes the *Odyssey* where it is said that shame is not proper for a needy man. That is as much as and no more than if Socrates were to say, "Let us drop that; I know it will not take us far." Socrates never gives his interlocutor the impression that any argument he uses is water-proof or that any objection he presents cannot be rebutted. The whole purpose of the discussion is to help the interlocutor air his notions, beliefs, and presuppositions, undo their entanglements, and shed light on their obscurities, to look into his own mind with less clouded eyes. Socrates lived up to his profession. He never claimed to teach; he never pretended to have any knowledge to impart.

His mission was to incite his interlocutors to self-examination and self-knowledge, hoping that thus they would discover their true worth as rational human beings, as souls whose one virtue and whole worth is the life of the mind, is intelligent living, is living intelligence.

55

Why do many people find my little piece about Hippias so difficult to digest? It is because they mistake the purpose of my writings as they mistook the purpose of Socrates' elenctic examinations. They think the purpose is to reach

valid conclusions. Not so. The purpose is to examine suppositions and in examining suppositions to examine our own minds. But perhaps people who are puzzled by this piece have some excuse. In it I think I permitted myself to be more playful than usual. The character of Hippias always drew out the fiendish in me.

The key to the first part is given early in the discussion where Socrates asks if the false are to be classed with those that have no power or with those that have power and Hippias answers that the false have power. Power, like everything positive, like all that affirms being, is good. To tie up falsehood with power is to make falsehood good. Once we do that there is no end to the contradictions we fall into. That is the moral crux of the piece.

Another point of the piece is the contrast between the dialectic method of Socrates which examines the consistencies and inconsistencies of various statements, drawing out their implications, and the rhetorical method of Hippias which is not concerned with understanding, but only with victory in the rhetorical contest.

The third part is at once the most playful and the most serious. The supposition of voluntary wrong-doing has the canker of contradictoriness in its very core.

56

I am afraid I cannot rid myself of yielding to blamable hubris whenever I think of how I wrote the *Protagoras*. Although I see the *Politeia* as the most complete statement of my philosophical position, yet I consider the *Protagoras* as a more perfect dramatic work. The play and interplay of characters and ideas just came to me so effortlessly – that was a happy and untroubled period of time during which I composed the piece. It is a comedy of ideas much more than a comedy of character. I could congratulate myself on other pieces for various reasons – on the *Symposium*, on the *Phaedrus*, but the *Protagoras* combines multiple excellences. Still, like all of my works, it has been subjected to much misunderstanding and needless controversy. People just can't absorb that no text can give you incontrovertible truth about anything. A text that you can criticize, that invites you to find fault with it, is wholesome food for the soul. A text that you cannot criticize is at best useless and more often than not is deadly poison.

The views of Protagoras are the views of a wise man who gave much thought to all things human. The Socratic criticism is not meant to establish alternatives to those views but to draw attention to the inescapable insufficiency of even the best of views. For there is indeed something in the extension I gave to the Man The Measure – that while there is some truth in all views, yet

some views are better than others in that they harmonize better with others or serve better the purposes of human life — the purposes of life themselves being the subject of views that are worse and views that are better. And what view of the purpose of life is best is something that everyone has to choose for oneself.

I simply cannot understand those who are perplexed by Socrates' farcical exegesis of the poem of Simonides. If they only remembered my repeated warnings — more than once in the *Protagoras* itself — against the folly of expecting any fixed text to yield final truth, or indeed any truth, they would have seen that episode for what it is, a broad parody on the contradictory and fantastic conclusions that can be obtained from any text given enough intellectual dexterity and roguishness, or, often, sheer imbecility combined with mental sharpness.

Other readers have been even more wild. When I make Protagoras point out and object to a fallacy in Socrates' argument, some of them think they are justified in taking the real Socrates to task on that account, and others think the writer of the drama, the creator of both the fallacy and its refutation, is guilty of committing the fallacy. Some people are too clever to have any room for goodwill in their souls — and that among people of enviable learning.

The piece has been subjected to so much misunderstanding and unjust criticism that I think

I will return again and again in these reflections to certain points in it.

57

At an early age I began to be intrigued by Orphic lore. At first perhaps I was attracted to it by sheer curiosity. I was fascinated by the poetic flight of fancy at a time when I was full of dreams of rivalling the great epic and tragic poets. Later, when I began my travels after we lost Socrates, and particularly when I stayed for a time in Italy and saw how the Pythagorean school absorbed much of Orphic teaching and mixed it with its philosophy, I began to see profound symbolism and insight in what had at first attracted me merely by its poetic beauty. I realized that it would never be possible to slice off the philosophic insight from the mythical embodiment. I knew that any attempt to extract the philosophic core and give it in a fixed formulation of pure thought would result in something farther removed from truth than the naïve myth. So in a number of my writings I made use of tales that even a fool would not take literally; that the clever waive away as silly and false, but only the wise understand as meaningful.

58

Some of my associates have been arguing that only the direct investigation of facts can give us

understanding. To this I reply that the world does not give us facts; what the world gives us, in itself and by itself, is always sterile and meaningless; facts are only facts within the perspective of a particular interpretation. Even when we acknowledge facts as facts, they can only give us results that pertain to the external world. Understanding can only be obtained by looking within our own mind. As I have put it in the *Phaedo*, understanding can only be reached by proceeding from pure ideas, through pure ideas, to pure ideas. This is what, in the *Politeia*, I assigned to the higher section of the higher division of the divided line, the region of *noêsis* or *phronêsis*.

The world can only be seen as an organized whole when seen through a vision the elements of which are organized ideas.

59

I am saddened when I see many members of my school engage in argument not to gain understanding but bewitched by the sheer fascination of arguing, or, worse still, for vainly parading their mental prowess. Doubtless the pleasure of conversation, the free and candid give and take of views, is a pure and refined pleasure hardly to be surpassed by any other available to a rational being. In such conversation the pleasure and the enlightenment obtaining are inseparable. It broadens and deepens the outlook of both parties and enables each, in sympathy, to unite

with the mind of the other, in the same way as in love lovers unite in a larger *psuchê*. But controversy aiming at victory and the overcoming of one point of view by another is contrary to all of this in every way and the pleasure derived from it is shallow and paltry; the one stands to the other like the sensation of tickling to the delight of poetic creation.

But I have strayed away from what I had in mind when I started writing this note. I am baffled by the heated controversies members of the Academy carry on about what they call my Theory of Forms — controversies in which they think they have no need to consult me, each party being convinced that they know definitely what my thought on the subject must be. One group affirm with assurance that I have a completely formed Theory of Forms differing from what Socrates held on the subject and then go on to wrangle among themselves about the interpretation of that theory, while another party affirm that though I had such a theory at one time yet I dropped it completely in my later years. Even though I am dismayed and almost despair of ever being properly understood I have to do what I have to do and will try to clarify my position.

Soon after I began to associate regularly with Socrates I saw that the first principle and ground of his whole outlook was the conviction that we human beings are human in virtue of such ideas and ideals as justice, decency, piety, and the like; that these ideas are found only in the mind; that

the things of the world that are presented to us through the bodily senses are distinct from these and different from these; that it is in and through and only in and through the ideas in the mind that we have understanding; that our prime concern as human beings should be with these ideas in the mind; that these ideas determine the quality of life we live; that it is in these ideas that we have our proper character as human beings and our dignity and our worth. It is in this conviction that Socrates found the meaning and purpose of life. This is the legacy I received from Socrates apart from which the whole of my life and my life-work would be meaningless.

When I cogitated on the basic Socratic principle I came to the view that not only do the ideas in the mind give us understanding of the true meaning and true value of life but that it is only by and through the ideas in the mind that we have any understanding, even understanding of the things that are presented to us through the senses. The presentations of the senses are meaningless when not placed under ideas produced by the mind. At first I saw that all arithmetic and all geometry is a product of the mind. Equal things are only seen as equal through the idea of the equal. The larger is larger and the smaller is smaller to us only through the idea of the larger and the smaller. Then I saw that whatever we can speak of is only meaningful to us by and through ideas coming from the mind. I do not know if these thoughts had ever occurred to

Socrates; I am not sure if, as these thoughts decidedly germinated from the basic thought of the primacy of the moral ideas in the mind, they may not also in their developed form have been instilled in me by hints in Socrates' conversations; this I cannot say, but that I owe these thoughts even in their developed form to Socrates, this I know.

I was elated by the thought of the ideas as the source of all understanding and the ground of evaluation and of values. I sang paeans of praise for the ideas in a number of my dramatic compositions; in the *Phaedo* and in the *Symposium*; in the *Phaedrus* I created a whole celestial world for them. But I did not forget, I hope I never for long forgot, that it is the mind, the living, active mind, that is the fount of all understanding and all value, that it is, as I affirmed in the *Politeia*, in *phronêsis* that we obtain philosophic insight and live the life proper to human beings.

At a certain stage I was intrigued by the question of how to relate the intelligible ideas in the mind to the things in the world on which the ideas confer intelligibility, how to express the unity of these distinct aspects of our living experience. I experimented with various formulations, but never found any one formulation fully satisfactory, which surely was to be expected. As I insisted in the *Politeia*, dialectic must destroy all hypotheses because no determinate formulation of thought can be free of

contradiction and it is only by destroying all definite formulations that our mind can remain alive.

When I wrote the *Parmenides* I meant to demonstrate this first by showing the contradictoriness involved in all formulations of the relation of the idea to the thing subsumed under the idea and then by extracting the contradictions entailed in all modes of giving expression to the idea of the one and the idea of being.

What is it that I am supposed to have dropped according to those that say that I have discarded my youthful belief in forms? That it is only in, by, and through ideas that we have understanding? That it is only these ideas that give us our human character and our human worth? Or where is that Theory which others say I have at one time or another maintained? Don't they know that I have repeatedly and emphatically said that no philosophic insight can be imprisoned in a fixed theoretical statement?

But I am exhausted by this lengthy dictation and Philippus, I am sure, is exhausted by taking down my dictation. So let me stop at this point and let me accompany dear Philippus for a refreshing stroll in the grove.

60

The measure of human ignorance is not what we do not know but what we deceive ourselves into thinking that we know.

61

I am annoyed by those of my associates and students, and other readers, but especially those among my associates and students, who pick up an argument or saying from some of my written pieces, and start arguing about it as if it were a positive and fixed doctrine. In spite of my having explained and insisted time and again that all arguments, opinions, and points of view expressed in the dialogues are living members of the drama and have their life and meaning only in the live give and take of the discussion going on there and that they are not meant to be taken, embraced, absorbed, in the definite attire in which they appear on the stage — no! they are not to be ‘taken’ at all; they are there to invite readers to consider for themselves not the statements but the issues in the act of discussing which the statements came into being. Even where the statement reflects a point of view or attitude or position that I hold dearly, the definite linguistic formulation in which it is given expression is a dead shell that inevitably does more harm than good to a mind that does not break the shell to

feel for itself the throbbing heart within, and ponder and wonder.

62

People keep asking me about things that Socrates says in my dramatic pieces, whether that was what Socrates said or thought or whether what is said there represents my own thought. Honestly, when I try turning that question in my mind, trying to adopt it as a question I ask myself, I do not find it making sense to me. What I owe to Socrates and what thoughts and views I developed myself — with the best will on earth I cannot separate these. Even had Socrates left us a written treatise, I sincerely believe that I would not have been able to draw a line between what Socrates meant and what meaning I find in his words. I would say the same of my relation to, my reading of, any original and profound thinker, but it is especially true in the case of Socrates. Socrates asserted emphatically and repeatedly that he did not teach anyone. He meant that and he spoke truly. Socrates did not teach me anything: what he did for me — and for others, but I speak only for myself — was much more far-reaching and much more valuable than any teaching. Socrates led me to a way that opened for me unlimited vistas of vision, insight, understanding. All of my thought I owe to Socrates and not a single one of my thoughts dare I ascribe to Socrates. — If readers should find this puzzling, so much the

better: God forbid that I should ever be instrumental to putting their minds at rest.

63

Several of my associates took to writing dramatic pieces similar to the ones I had written before I established the Academy. Many years ago someone wrote such a piece in which he made Alcibiades the interlocutor. He showed it to me. Not to discourage him I said it was a good attempt, but in fact I was not much impressed. There was nothing original in the piece. It was a mere re-arrangement of bits of the pieces in which I attempted to represent the elenctic discourses of Socrates. But it was spiritless. It lacked the cardinal factor of the genuine Socratic discourse, the *aporia*. It could perhaps serve as a good mnemonic for someone who had gone through the genuine examination and absorbed its lesson, but no more. It was little better than Xenophon's reports of putative disjointed occasional conversations of Socrates. Who was it that wrote that piece? I do not recall clearly; perhaps it was Aristotle soon after he joined the Academy.

64

When Critias and Charmides were killed during the overthrow of The Thirty, feelings in our family were mixed and the attitudes of diverse of our family members were strongly opposed to

one another. For myself, I had experienced such revulsion at what I saw as their moral downfall that when they were killed there was little room in my heart for the natural feeling of grief at the loss of close relatives. What was uppermost in my breast was a sense of humiliation that persons whom at one time I loved and admired and expected to do much good had so grievously belied my expectations. It may be that the folly and the stupidity of the democratic proceedings that followed dampened those feelings in me somewhat. When I came to write the *Charmides* I showed Critias, for all his cleverness and all his dallying with philosophy, to be muddle-headed, unable to focus on one thought or to keep up one line of argument even for a short while. Charmides appears there as a boy, intelligent and eager, but susceptible to evil influences. It was no wonder that they and the rest of The Thirty, when they came to possess power, could not see that good cannot come out of wrongful and unlawful deeds.

In his *Sisyphus* Critias said that faith in the gods was invented by clever men for the good of society. It is not hard to discover that men have invented and will invent gods and stories of the gods. But the astute persons who pride themselves on finding this out are likely to overlook two important considerations. First, although once belief in gods is in place, rulers who desire to subdue the common people and keep them in harness may exploit the belief for their purposes,

yet that does not indicate that the initiator of the belief was motivated by expediency. This leads to the second consideration I alluded to. The invention of the gods answers to a human need. Those clever persons who discover that the gods were a human invention commit a grave error when they think that they can thereafter live happily without the gods. In craving the divine we become divine. We invent gods and stories of gods; but the gods we create, who have no existence outside us, live in us and we live in them. The divine is real, is our very reality.

65

Why is it pointless to engage in controversy with someone holding a view opposed to yours? Because that view is never a thing standing all by itself; it is necessarily embedded in and organically united with a whole web of beliefs, presuppositions, and judgements. The connection between the parts of the web may be coherent and consistent or not, but in either case you cannot meaningfully discuss the part without bringing the whole out into the open. To discuss any view or judgement meaningfully you have to go down to basic principles and fundamental assumptions. And if the principles and assumptions of the individuals engaged in controversy are opposed or different, then the best they can do, if they are intelligent, is to understand why they differ. If they are not sufficiently intelligent, they will only

quarrel and bandy accusations and insults at each other. You can only truly enter into meaningful discussion with a person whose basic outlook (which is always an intricate whole) is sufficiently in harmony with yours.

66

I have almost come to despair utterly of making people, even seasoned associates of the Academy, realize that a philosophical discussion or a philosophical piece of writing, cannot be reduced to a precise mathematical formulation on the model of geometrical theorems. A genuinely philosophical statement can never be a definitively formulated enunciation of a 'truth' valid for all time and in all contexts. That is why I have always insisted that philosophical statements turn into falsehoods once they forgo the dialectical examination that bares and undermines their presuppositions. The primary function of a philosophical statement, whether in a live discussion or in a written text, should be to open up questions, to incite reflection, to prompt to an autonomously evolved vision.

I have been provoked to these thoughts by hearing members of the Academy arguing that there is a contradiction between statements made by Socrates in two of my early writings. They say that while Socrates in the *Apologia* affirms that he would rather be obedient to God than to the city, in the *Crito* he chooses to obey the city rather

than save himself — as if these were constructions of mathematical abstractions, whose whole *alêtheia* was exhausted in the symbolic expression, and not verbal intimations of living thought, heavy with untold associations, resonant with vibrant nuances, that can never be contained in a finite formulation. But I have said all of this time and again, so that I feel there is no sense in trying to explain it further to persons who are determined not to understand.

67

Socrates' trances were common knowledge to all Athenians, but no one, to my knowledge, ever asked him about the experience. They simply took them as one of his many peculiarities. And even though I often puzzled about it, I never asked him. Socrates' trances were certainly not cataleptic; they were periods of intense concentration. But Socrates was not a theory builder and his periods of concentration were not connected with the solution of any theoretical riddles. I could only imagine to myself that at those times of high concentration Socrates was contemplating the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things that led to and confirmed that one certain reality, that one and only — for us — source of all reality: our own inner reality that we may call *psuchê* or *nous* but would do far better to call the activity or creativity of *psuchê* or *nous*, that is,

phronêsis. That creative activity in us is our reality and is all we know of Reality.

68

In many of my early writings, Socrates says, or argues as if he meant to say, that what a person desires is the good for that person. This, taken at its face value, can lead to consequences incompatible with Socrates' confirmed insistence on an ultimately non-relative good for a human being. Indeed, such a statement finely illustrates the folly of taking any determinate statement as if it could have meaning except in its proper context. Such a statement on the part of Socrates, in those writings, is employed either to single out good in a sense relevant to a specific context, or is employed as a preliminary supposition to lead to the discovery that such a good – a good so defined – cannot be the good our true humanity aspires to. Which again shows the folly of contending with, arguing against, arguing for or arguing from any isolated statement, particularly and especially any statement snatched from my Socratic writings.

69

I return again and again in these notes to my early writings, much more so than to my late writings. Perhaps the reason is that in those early writings the problems that are of lasting relevance to the meaning and value of our humanity were

what occupied my thought most. They were the problems that were the lifelong concern of Socrates. In my late writings I dealt mostly with questions discussed in the Academy and elsewhere, and had the outlook and the understandings of the early examinations as background and underlying foundation. Not that these late writings themselves are not subject to much misunderstanding and much misinterpretation, which I wish to clear up, if I am given the opportunity.

70

The wise men who wrote books *peri phuseôs* and others who tried to give accounts answering all the basic questions that have always teased thinking persons and yet others who have delivered teachings that sought to find meaning and value in life, all of those persons even if they did not presume or aspire to know all things at any rate sought to attain a comprehensive view encompassing all things. This had to be. A human being, to fulfil her or his proper perfection must become whole and see herself or himself as a whole. For a human being to see herself or himself as a whole she or he must see Reality as a Whole. Our vision of the Whole that is Reality has one source: it is our vision of our inner reality as a whole. Of the Whole that is Reality and the whole that is our inner and our proper reality we can give an account, but that account can never

be final. It is always a particular myth representing the Reality. We cannot have a final account of Reality, but can have ultimate principles that can be variously represented. Reality – the ultimate Reality that is the Whole and the reality that is our inner proper being – remains a mystery that can be intimated in varying myths but never solidified in a fixed formulation.

71

I have been asked what my intention was in writing the *Thaetetus*. I had planned that piece about the time the Spartan power was broken by Epaminondas at Leuctra, in response to diverse views about knowledge that were being debated in the Academy. About that time also Theaetetus left us for duty at Corinth. When we received the news of his death my grief was great. My heart was pressed not only by the loss of such a worthy friend and companion, but also because I had been looking forward to his return to continue his brilliant mathematical work. For a while I was unable to regain the impetus to start working on the piece I had already sketched out, until it occurred to me to introduce Theaetetus in it as interlocutor and make the whole piece a tribute to that noble man.

But I have been drawn away by the memory of Theaetetus from what I had in mind when I sat down to write this note. What was my intention in writing the *Thaetetus*? As I said, I meant to

examine views on knowledge that were being debated in the Academy. Socrates, to my knowledge, never posed the question What is knowledge? Socrates, as I represented in my early writings, always put to the examination a moral character, and when the examination led to the position that this or that virtue is knowledge, the next question was not What is knowledge?, but What knowledge is it that is one with that virtue or with all virtue? Knowledge of what? And when that led to the position that it was knowledge of the good, further examination showed that the good in turn can only be understood in terms of knowledge. That was the final end of the Socratic examination: knowledge and virtue are one thing and neither knowledge nor virtue can be understood in terms of anything other than knowledge and virtue. That one thing that is knowledge and virtue at once is the reality within us. To know is to look inside. To be good is to be one with the reality that is within us. Knowledge is the self-evidence of that reality. The *gnôthi sauton* translates into: see your inner reality and be that reality, live out that reality.

In the *Politeia* I did not deal with the question What is knowledge?, but gave an account of levels of knowledge. We perceive things outside us. This is the lowest level. At the lowest level we perceive things outside us, we have images of these things or beliefs about them. At a higher level we subject these perceptible things to forms of thought and have what we may call knowledge. At a higher

level still we have understanding of pure ideas in active intelligence. The highest intelligence is understanding of The Good which is the ground and source of being and knowledge and life, and that understanding we find in our own inner reality.

In the *Theaetetus* Socrates examines various views about knowledge, all of which have some point to them, all of which give us some understanding, and, what is more, give us opportunity for further reflection and exploration, but none of which gives a final answer to the question What is knowledge? To that question there is one answer: Knowledge is knowledge; it is the luminosity that you find within yourself when your mind is active, it is the self-evidence of your inner reality, for that reality is nothing but active intelligence.

72

I have always insisted that no articulate statement can ever be self-sufficient. In the *Theaetetus* one of the views advanced was that knowledge is true belief supported by *logos*. This sounds like a view advanced in the *Meno*. In the context of the *Meno* that view makes good sense. Some of my comrades in the Academy see that as an adequate definition of knowledge. But when we examine it, then, as Socrates says in the *Theaetetus*, we find it resembling a sketched drawing which, seen at a distance, seems to make

sense, but when examined closely fails to satisfy. But I have gone over this matter repeatedly and don't feel I have to elaborate on it further at this point.

73

In my intellectual ventures I have made many false openings. I have no regrets. But one such false opening about which I am really furious with myself was my craze for a time for the method of collection and division. Aristotle is a great adept of the method and has been using it to arrange living things in families and sub-families. I am unable to recall who it was who first suggested the method but, in any case, for a while the method took my fancy and I thought it might help in clarifying ideas and in my first fascination with the idea I made Socrates in the *Phaedrus* propose it as the true method of inquiry. When I wrote the *Sophist* I found it useful as a method of exposition. But going further on, I saw that while the method could be usefully employed in the area where Aristotle was employing it, it was inapplicable in the area of pure ideas except for elucidating a previously formed conception. The inquirer would not be genuinely looking for actually existing characteristics that determine the sorting out of kinds but would arbitrarily introduce characteristics that are elements of his pre-formed conception. When I experimented with the method in the *Politikos* and the *Philebus* I was

aware that I was breaking all the rules set for the method and I knew that in itself it would not give any understanding. At best, the method works as a taxonomy of *eidôla*. It has no function in philosophy proper.

74

When I wrote the *Theaetetus*, some readers said that I was replacing the idea of *anamnêsis* with the idea of *maieusis*. When you use one metaphor then another metaphor to convey the same idea, does that mean that you have discarded the first metaphor? Both metaphors express the same insight, namely, that all knowledge and all reality can only be found within the mind. In my early writings, Socrates again and again says that he does not instruct his interlocutor or impart to him any knowledge but simply helps him to find and bring out the knowledge he has within his mind. In the *Meno* I link the idea of *anamnêsis* to the notion of palingenesis. How often do I have to explain that in things that concern us most all our vaunted knowledge is nothing but metaphor and simile and myth? Didn't I say that explicitly of the Form of the Good in the *Politeia*? All that the *muthos* of re-birth or re-incarnation intimates is that whatever knowledge and whatever reality we find within us, we can only think of as of divine origin, as being there in us because we are rooted in a reality that is ultimately divine. And going back

to the idea of *maieusis* — when in the *Symposium* Socrates speaks of *tokos en tõi kalõi*, does not the notion of *maieusis* come naturally in the train of that? I am tired of people obstinately refusing to understand what I try to put in the plainest of words. Their failure to understand is not due to any weakness in their intellect: they employ their minds most cleverly on outside things; they turn with the whole of their minds to the outside; they do not give themselves the opportunity to experience inwardly the reality of their minds, to live their inner reality.

75

Heavy news has reached us today. Visitors having arrived from Tarentum, we inquired after Archytas, and were told the sad news. A couple of months earlier he perished at sea during a violent storm. They say that the body has not been recovered.

I first saw Archytas towards the close of my early journeying following the death of Socrates and before I came back to Athens to found my school. I visited Tarentum of set purpose to make his acquaintance, having learned of his remarkable mathematical researches. At our first meeting I felt as if I was renewing a deeply rooted, age-long friendship. I went to Tarentum prepared to see a brilliant mathematician and man of science; I found myself in the presence of an

example of accomplished humanity: noble, open-hearted, generous, kind.

I learned much of him in the fields of geometry and arithmetic, and although he showed little interest in certain philosophical questions that were for me of primary importance, I always found his conversation soul-enriching. He seemed inwardly to shed an afflux of goodness that seeped into all that came into contact with him. I recall how his flute-playing used to fill me with a contentment I could not explain to myself.

My heart is heavy. Archytas was not much younger than I am. So it is not unnatural or unexpected that his life should have ended now. But the sudden disappearance of such a paragon of true virtue is a poignant reminder that in this inconstant world we are but fleeting shadows.

76

Once more I go back in thought to Archytas, and may the gods forgive me the disloyalty in this reflection. It seems to me that Archytas accepted too much of the thought of his Pythagorean friends without due examination. He, like them, trusted mathematics to lead us to the understanding of all things. I too shared his enthusiasm for mathematics. The study of geometry, arithmetic, astronomy, and harmonics forms the hard core of our work in the Academy, to the extent that Aristotle and others have been complaining that the priority we give to these

subjects makes us neglect other no less important sciences. But to expect the study of mathematics to give us understanding of the essence of things and to yield answers to ultimate questions about the real and the good, is to mistake mathematics – which can never be anything more than a propaedeutic – for philosophy proper. It may be that our friend Antisthenes was right in holding that words are too protean, too fickle to serve as tools in our quest for reality. But the remedy is not to replace living words with dead symbols. The symbols we can arrange and re-arrange into patterns that may enable us to build bridges and determine the path of planets and stars but which will never disclose any meaning beyond what we had ourselves put into the particular system of symbols we are working with. The remedy is to play with our protean, fickle, living words; being alive and nimble they will dance and while they dance we may catch through the waving forms a glimpse of the life within. That is all that is permitted us, feeble mortals, of true knowledge. And if, glad of the glimpse of life we caught through the waving forms, we beseech the words, “Stay! Let me take hold of the light that shone!”, we are mocked and find in our grasp dead words.

I am possessed as I have never been since I wrote the *Phaedrus* and the passage about the Form of the Good in the *Politeia* and am exhausted. I have to pause and rest.

77

It is six years now since Eudemus of Cyprus died. Although naturally all members of the Academy were profoundly grieved at the untimely loss of such a brilliant and gentle colleague, even while deeply engulfed in sorrow I could not fail to be especially impressed by Aristotle's passion at the time. He and Eudemus had not had much agreement intellectually. They always argued together and their arguments never seemed to reach mutual understanding. When Eudemus died, Aristotle's sorrow seemed to be tinged with compunction. He composed a touching elegy in which he praised Eudemus as having shown, by thought and by his own life, that to be happy and good is indeed one thing and not two. What a world of difference between the atmosphere of pervasive love and respect in which we live within a society devoted to study and learning and that of the outside world. Indeed, is not that the chief gift of *philosophia*, the final aim of true *paideia*, to fit all human beings to live together as one loving, caring family?

78

From absolutely nothing there can come absolutely nothing.

On the level of Reality, the Primary Creative Urge, the Form of the Good, could not have created the world if she did not have her own

Existence to mould and shape into the infinite unceasing flow of shapes and relations that is the world at any instant of time.

On the level of thought, there is no thought without presuppositions. Presuppositions are the substance of thought. We cannot think without presuppositions. But not to remain prisoners to our presuppositions, we have constantly to break down our presuppositions, but the tools with which we carry out the demolition can only be other presuppositions. Our freedom, our salvation, our sanity, our rationality, reside in clearly and fully being aware of that.

79

A few years ago some of my friends repeatedly insisted that I give a lecture on The Good. In vain did I repeat again and again that understanding the good is the whole of philosophy and that the whole of philosophy, the heart of philosophy, cannot be contained in any fixed, determinate, formula of words. Philosophical understanding is an enlightenment, a light, a fire, that can only be kindled by the anguished and agonizing dialectical endeavour; a living fire that can only keep burning by consuming itself in the never-abating dialectical travail. When they seemed unable or unwilling to accept that, I decided to give them what they deserved, to give them what they asked for. I told them I would give the lecture they asked for. I prepared a lengthy lecture on the

nature of number. What a wonderful thing is number, a thing that is not a thing; a thing that is nowhere and yet is everywhere; a thing that cannot be seen, cannot be heard, cannot be touched, and yet nothing that is visible can be seen without it, nothing audible can be heard without it, nothing palpable can be touched without it. I prepared the lecture and told my friends they could invite all who would like to attend. There was quite an audience. They – at least a few of them, I hope – left puzzled and wondering, which may possibly be the best thing that ever happened to them. I hope that one or two could see where they had to look for the Good.

80

Aristotle has a knack which sometimes I envy him but then again am grateful to the gods that I am not endowed with it. He has a love for and is adept at keeping things – especially thoughts – tidy, neat, and orderly. In teaching, one method that I find highly beneficial is to advance a hypothesis – no matter whether, on the face of it, it looks reasonable or absurd – and let my students follow its consequences wherever they may lead. In the *Phaedo* and in the *Phaedrus* I tried to formalize that as a method of research. Aristotle worked that into a *technê*, with special rules and paradigms, to derive new knowledge from

hypotheses by an orderly process which he calls syllogism.

That is very good as far as it goes. It is good for the knowledge relating to the things in the world outside us, which comes to us through the bodily senses — knowledge that in the *Politeia* I confined to the lower section of the higher division of the Divided Line. Aristotle says that if knowledge based on syllogistic inference is to be possible, the hypotheses from which it is derived must not in their turn be required to be derived from other, higher or more general, hypotheses. That, he sees, would lead to an endless regress. He says that both the ground hypothesis from which our inference or proof starts and the particulars that are to be brought under the ground hypothesis must be known to us immediately. This necessarily means that the 'new' knowledge the inference yields is only new in a qualified sense. It was already there. Thus this *technê* is only workable within a closed system and can only work with things already known. No wonder Aristotle calls his newly invented *technê* analytic.

But it is only in the practical sphere and for practical purposes that we can stop at a certain arbitrarily determined stage in the process of establishing our working hypotheses on yet higher ones. Practically, we have to stop somewhere in ascending that we may descend to usable conclusions. But in principle there is no stopping anywhere. In the *Politeia* I emphasized that no

hypotheses can be deemed final; that all hypotheses must be demolished.

And all of this relates only to the sphere of knowledge of the world of shadows. When we turn to the sphere of the understanding that is the goal of true philosophy, inference and proof have purely a didactic function, as a method of explanation and clarification. Philosophical understanding is not reached by inference but is achieved through the creative introduction of ideas that transform the given many, or many givennesses, into a whole that reflects the wholeness of creative intelligence. That is what I mean when I say that philosophical understanding is prophetic, and that is the gist of the myth of reminiscence and of the metaphor of *maieusis* — this, indeed, is *tokos en tōi kalōi*.

81

Socrates was the best teacher ever. He said he was teacher to no one, that he had nothing to teach to anyone. He was not feigning or dissembling, nor was he ironical. The best teacher is he who teaches nothing. The best teacher is he who causes his associates to wonder, to question, to seek to understand, above all to seek to understand themselves. Of the best teacher, the seemingly simplest, most straightforward statement is never simple or straightforward: it conceals a mystery that engenders endless questions, voicing a deathless yearning for an

understanding that is to be found nowhere but in the seeking.

82

I am often embarrassed when people accord me the veneration which I would be willing to accept if directed to my principles and my works. They make me feel a fraud and a cheat. I am not as good as my principles. Apart from Socrates I have never known a man that was as good as his principles. Perhaps also that mad dog Diogenes; there is much of Socrates in him, but he does not have the equipoise and wholesome all-round balance of Socrates. I am the product of my imperfect upbringing and the imperfect surroundings and influences that shaped my personality and my life. But my principles and my works are the product of pure dreams, good aspirations, serene musings. This is not to say that my philosophy and my works are perfect, but their imperfection is the imperfection of everything that comes into this mutable, illusory world. *Their* imperfection is the imperfection of their world; *my* imperfection is my own: *their* imperfection is the imperfection of their substance; *my* imperfection is in my very form.

83

I began writing these notes hoping that I would give in a connected, ordered whole a

summing up of what I have arrived at in the course of a lifetime given to study and reflection. I found myself writing down fragmented, disjointed thoughts. Only he who can see in all the fragments together and in every one of the fragments a single and selfsame thought will have understood what I have to say.

84

When I wrote the *Sophist*, where I made the Eleatic visitor reprove the friends of the Forms for their language which made what is real appear to be motionless and lifeless, many thought I was turning my back on views I had formerly cherished. How could that be? True, in my early writings, being concerned to emphasize the superiority, supremacy, and logical priority of the intelligible realm over the perceptible, I used images and metaphors that strongly, too strongly, opposed the eternity of the intelligible to the temporality of the perceptible. But how could I be blind to life and reason and creativity in the real, to the life and intelligence and creativity of the real? How could I, when I spoke of *tokos en tõi kalõi* as the apex of the ascent of *Erôs* to the highest Form? How could I, when in the *Politeia* I made that highest Form, the Form of the Good, the source of all being, all life, all intelligence? The *psuchê* was for Socrates, and has always been for me, the home and the fount of the intelligible; the *psuchê* has always been for me, as it was for

Socrates, all that we know of reality, and the *psuchê* is life and intelligence and procreation. When I wrote that part of the *Sophist*, I had in mind friends of mine, friends of the Forms, who allowed the letter of my earlier language to lead them to error.

85

There are those who say that in my latest writings I have abandoned the Forms. If, with age, I have changed my idiom, must I have changed my thought? Have I ceased to believe that it is only in the realm of the intelligible that we commune with the Real? And I have not in fact changed my idiom: only, perhaps, there are certain words, certain set phrases, that I have not been repeating as often as I used to. I have also not been making long ramblings in the garden as often as I used to!

86

In the *Lysis* I made Socrates, by a specious argument, conclude that the good, being self-sufficient, does not have affection for another, does not love another, cannot be friendly towards another. That was foolish, disloyal, and ungenerous. Foolish because it overlooks what I have often had to remind myself of — that clever arguments can do grave harm. Disloyal because I should have known, should have felt, that it was

out of character with Socrates. Ungenerous because, without affection, without caring for another, without love, human life would be very poor indeed. It gives me some comfort to feel that I must have grown out of that foolishness when I said in the *Timaeus* that the maker of the universe made it because, being good, he wished all things to share in his goodness. Surely this thought, without pretense of argument or proof, is saner and more wholesome than the earlier one with its meretricious argumentation.

87

From early on in the Academy I have been daily inviting a handful of our members to share my midday meal. The group present has to be small enough to allow for intimate give and take in conversation, but I take care to leave no one uninvited over a long stretch of time. We also have our monthly banquets, attended by all members, in which the conversation and the wine run with equal liberality.

For the midday meal this day I included Phaedra and Electra, our two female students. Soon after Phaedruss, our youngest member, joined us a few years ago, he told me that his sister Phaedra discusses with him philosophical questions most intelligently and that, encouraged by what I wrote in the *Politeia* about women, dreams of joining the Academy. I must admit that for a while I wavered, but I could not give the lie

to what I had been solemnly advocating. I told Phaedrus that his sister was welcome to join us; he then said that Phaëdra would also like her bosom friend, Electra, to come with her. I welcomed that: surely two girls in the Academy would be less of an anomaly than one girl alone. Ever since the two girls came, they have made me proud, confirming me in my belief that a woman, given the opportunity, could rival the best of men.

At our meal today, at a point when the conversation seemed to be flagging, Phaëdra spoke. "If Father Plato will permit me, I might do him the kind of violence that he did Father Parmenides by the mouth of the Eleatic Xenos in the *Sophist*." She looked up at me. I smiled and said, "My dear, what are we here for if not to examine our thought, and in examining our thought to examine ourselves, never allowing our convictions the hubris of pretending to the permanence of the divine?" Phaëdra said, "It is exactly the permanence of the divine that I have a mind to challenge. I think Heraclitus had profound insight when he saw the primary substance of the world as fire, all-consuming fire. If the first of all things is the divine, then nothing can be more restless than the divine. When we apply to the intelligible Forms, the ground and necessary condition of all understanding — when we apply to them those epithets and phrases dear to the heart of Father Plato, phrases denoting immutability and unchangeability and everlastingness, though I am stirred in my inmost,

yet I am also struck with the fear that we might be cutting ourselves off from the real world.”

Electra interposed. “My dear Phaedra,” she said, “surely the ‘real’ world that we can grasp, literally and metaphorically speaking, is the world of imperfection that your Heraclitus saw as incessantly fleeting and that Father Plato equates with the shadows in the cave. It is only when we audaciously aspire to do the undoable, when we seek to confine Reality, that is strictly incomprehensible and ineffable, in finite formulations of thought, that we can find that Reality within us, or rather bring that Reality to be in us. When we discover that the everlastingness of the everlasting is vacuous, if we then be content with the transient phantoms of our actual world, we become no more than a part of that world, become absorbed into the flux of shadows. But when we demand that the everlasting contain the unlasting, then we transcend our own unlastingness in the lasting within us. This is all myth, but it is only through myth that we can break through the confines of our actual world of imperfection and commune with that Reality, the Form of the Good, that Father Plato says is beyond being and beyond understanding. My dear Phaedra, you have wisely said: ‘If the first of all things is the divine, then nothing can be more restless than the divine.’ Let me add that only restless thought that dare create myths and dare destroy its own myths, is living thought, and not dead.”

At this point I looked at Aristotle who was present. He could hardly contain his irritation. Only large gulps of wine helped him keep the peace.

88

I have often been asked to sum up the argument of the *Politeia*. I have been asked what ground plan I had in mind when I started to write that book. When I start working on a new piece of writing, I would have a half-formed idea of what purpose I want that writing to serve; I would plan a framework for working out the idea; then, as I write, the work unfolds, obeying its own inner reason. Then I leave it for readers to make of it what they will. A poet is never the best person to give an objective account of his poem. I am a poet and I know that I am not the best person to interpret my own work. However, I will try.

When I wrote the *Politeia* my basic object was, as in all of my works, to vindicate the good life. I took up *dikaiosunê* as an icon representing the good life. I could have taken up any other virtue for that purpose. To try to understand *dikaiosunê* by examining it from the outside leads nowhere, as all my early writings were meant to show. *Dikaiosunê* as an aspect of the good life is one with the wellbeing of the soul. To picture the wellbeing of the soul I portrayed the wellbeing of an imaginary city, bearing in mind also that a good citizen can hardly live a normal life except

in a good city. In drawing the portrait of my imaginary city I allowed myself to be as fanciful as Aristophanes in his *Ecclesiazusae*, but at the same time I could of course not be forgetful of the actual wrongs and ills of Athens and the rest of the Hellenic world. With a picture of the good individual and the good city before us, it could be seen that the ground and condition of a good life is knowledge of the truly good, which is one with the truly real. Indeed, the only true knowledge is knowledge of the good and the real. The only way to the knowledge of the good and the real is to be one with the good and the real and to find the good and the real in oneself. At this point my basic project was complete and indeed at this point I made Socrates say it in so many words. But I wanted to show more plainly that the happy life is none other than the life of the healthy, wholesome soul, and I thought I could do this by means of contrast, by drawing pictures of unhealthy and unwholesome constitutions. Then some mad whim made me add the final part.

Probably few will find this a good summary of the *Politeia*. Anyway, for me, the middle part of that work, the part about education and the types of knowledge and the Form of the Good, is the very heart not only of the *Politeia* but of the whole of my lifework. All that went before was leading to it and all that came after was marginal to it. I would gladly leave this as my last will and testimony.

89

In the *Crito*, after Socrates says that “we ought not to retaliate or render evil for evil to anyone, whatever evil we may have suffered from him”, I made him go on to say, “this opinion has never been held, and never will be held, by any considerable number of persons; and those who are agreed and those who are not agreed upon this point have no common ground, and can only despise one another when they see how widely they differ.” What made me do that? I feel it almost as a betrayal. Socrates never doubted that all human beings are capable of being good; that all human beings are essentially good; that corruption is a foreign accretion to human nature. It was the despair instilled in me by what we had all been through that made me give utterance to that black thought. But was I wrong there? Was Socrates right? That is so hard to believe. But if we don’t believe it, if we lose the naïve faith of Socrates, would not the whole of human life be as meaningless as it is sordid, a cruel and tasteless practical joke played on us by the gods? I do not want to die with that suspicion eating into my soul.

90

I have never ceased to wonder at the friendship that was between Socrates and Crito. Those two men were different in every way, yet in

another way they were one man. Their mutual love was so deep, their mutual understanding so complete, that there was no need for words for one of them to know what the other thought, what the other wanted. With Socrates, every thought, every move, was reasoned; his most spontaneous act could readily be fitted into the rational scheme that governed all his behaviour, all his life. Crito was simplicity itself; everything he did flowed readily from his good nature. It was not surprising that they should agree, since both had in a high degree the virtues of a noble character, but the profound sympathy and warm intimacy between them I found puzzling in some way. It may be that some persons, though good by nature like Socrates, yet have need to think out the ground of their goodness. But if a Crito can be so good without philosophizing, what use is all our reasoning about moral questions and moral values? I feel that there is a satisfactory answer to this question, but at this moment I am content with the puzzle itself: it assures me that goodness is not foreign to human nature.

91

In the *Ion* and elsewhere I made Socrates say that poets produce their best work not by dint of any knowledge or wisdom of their own but under inspiration. In the *Ion* my immediate object was to ridicule the vain pomposity of the ignorant rhapsode who fancies himself all-knowing and all-

wise, but what is said of poetry and poets there points to a real problem. All of us in what we do best, in our best work and in our best deeds, surpass our normal selves. We always do what we do best under inspiration — well, inspiration may not be the best word. Our reality, the reality that is our very core, only comes out partially and faintly in what we normally see as ourselves, what we normally present as ourselves. Even in works that we most pride ourselves on, we may be only skimming the surface of our reality. But at our best moments something gushes forth from unsounded and unsuspected depths within us and flows into works or deeds that surprise us more than they surprise those around us who think they know us. Why is that so? How is that so? Is it perhaps that our reality is rooted in ultimate Reality, that the integrity of our person is grounded in the Whole of wholes so that at times our reality gives birth to what is beautiful and good? That is just what I had in mind when in the *Symposium* I said that when the soul of the lover attains the vision of the highest Beauty she gives birth to beautiful progeny.

92

I have never experienced such irking compunction as when I was planning to write the *Phaedo*. In the *Apologia Socraticus* I had represented the position of Socrates on the question of immortality as he had disclosed it

whenever there was occasion for him to do so. He had no settled opinion and was not concerned to have any settled opinion on the question. He knew of the Orphic and Pythagorean doctrines and he knew of the beliefs underlying the Eleusinian Mysteries, but his unwavering position was always that he had no time to examine the truth or falsehood of such doctrines or claims. As I made him say in the *Phaedrus* concerning the common *muthoi* about the gods and heroes, his occupation with examining his own reality left him no leisure to examine those tales. He did not care to challenge the traditional beliefs so long as they did not conflict with the moral values and rational principles he upheld.

I knew all that. But in Orphism, in Pythagoreanism, in the mysteries, I found a vision and vital insights whispering that within us there is something divine or akin to the divine. Whether it is or is not correct to assert that there is in us a soul that survives death, I found our whole worth and the whole meaning of our life in that we are a soul that conquers death. We are a soul that is above change and mutability and temporality. That is a sharing in divinity, in the eternity of the divine, that we readily designate as immortality. What immortality entails, what it means in specific terms, I will not asseverate with confidence. What I feel confident about is that death is not the annihilation of what is real in us.

Full of those sentiments, I could not portray the last moments of Socrates without dwelling on

the immortality of that most noble and most wise of all souls. I permitted myself to reverse the positions that – had the discourse I recounted in fact taken place – would have pertained to Simmias and Cebes on the one hand and to Socrates on the other hand. Simmias and Cebes accepted the teaching of Philolaus and it would have been their part to argue for immortality and it would have been the part of Socrates to show that we can have no certainty on the subject. In any case, the arguments I advanced there could not and were not meant to produce any conclusive proof, but were meant to affirm the divinity of the soul.

Now I am approaching my own final rest. Whether there is in me a something that will outlast the dissolution of my earthly being I cannot assert, but I am content that while I lived I have lived in the eternity of communion with what is real.

93

When I first saw Dion on my first visit to Syracuse, I must confess that it was the charm of his youthful beauty that immediately captivated me. Must we always be such fools that when fascinated by a beautiful form we fancy all excellence associated with that form? But Dion was in fact not lacking in other perfections. He had an alert understanding and was full of high ideals and noble aspirations. He put fresh life into

my old dream of a good and wise ruler holding the reins of government in a city, so that I could not resist the promise of his ambitious project. I found myself going along with him to the bitter end. I should have known, and in fact half knew, that it was a hopeless project. Indeed, even had our hopes in Dionysus not been belied, what could he, or what could Dion, have achieved. Archytas was noble and good and wise and his city empowered him. While he ruled he ruled sanely and did what good a ruler can do; but what lasting good did he leave behind him? It seems that the good of states does not lie in human hands, at any rate not in the hands of particular individuals at particular times and particular places, even when inspired with the best of intentions. Good rulers may spare their cities much evil that bad rulers inflict or bring about, but beyond that the fate of human societies seems to be wrought by inscrutable forces and hidden causes. How sad it is that while bad rulers can do tremendous harm, the utmost that good rulers mostly seem able to do is to leave that harm undone. How wise was Socrates in his insistence that a philosopher's place is not at the helm of government but among individual persons, seeking to make them a little more good, a little more wise. And yet I am unable to forgo the hope that a better constitution may promise a better life. I have tried to suggest ideas for such a constitution in the book that I have lately been working on. Possibly I may not live to put it in

final shape, but I am confident that my good Philippos would not neglect to do what is needful.

94

What is argument? What good is argument ever? What dispute can ever be settled by argument? People who come to argue against each other, starting from different positions and arguing for different positions, come each equipped with a different set of presuppositions and convictions, from which follow good consistent conclusions completely at variance with the conclusions that follow, equally well and equally consistently, from the other set of presuppositions and convictions. With disputes in the practical field, if we are wise, we try to find some common ground and try to see which position is in tune and which out of tune with the agreed common ground. Thus in the practical sphere, if we can free ourselves of false pride and if we have genuine goodwill, we can in this way make opposed positions exchange hostility for neighbourly tolerance and cooperation. But in the field of theory, there can never be agreement unless the parties are willing to unearth their presuppositions and assumed convictions and acknowledge their essential arbitrariness and ephemerality: for the best of our presuppositions and the best of our first principles are inadequate reflections and representations of the original intelligibility of creative intelligence — the best

of our presuppositions and the best of our principles I say, but most of the presuppositions and convictions that mould our characters, determine our attitudes, govern our lives, guide our action, most of them have run so far away from the original source and spring, have become so covered and clogged with putrid matter, so enmeshed in foul shrubbery, that the hope of taking human understanding back to its pristine purity borders on insanity. Yet to give up that hope is to cross the border entering fully into that dreaded insanity. There remains only one course for humans that value their humanity — to follow Socrates and by confessing our ignorance free the mind of grosser ignorance.

95

At a certain point in the *Euthydemus* I put into the mouth of the lad Cleinias a biting remark about geometricians, astronomers, and arithmeticians. I classed them with hunters and fishers who do not know how to make use of their catch but have to hand it to the cook who can make use of it. In the same way, the boy said, geometricians, astronomers, and arithmeticians, should hand their findings to the dialecticians, for they themselves do not know what to make of them. I was exasperated with the devotees of those sophisticated sciences. They thought their refined sciences gave them the key to all knowledge and all understanding. I myself have

been bewitched by the charm of these sciences and have often been lured into expecting too much of them. But even while I was most bedazzled by those sciences, or lured by others that have been emerging, I could not be wholly forgetful of the truth that any knowledge that looks outwards can only look at the surface of things; even when what it looks at is a product of the mind, it views it as something held before the mind, and so as object. No object, as object, reveals to us its heart. It is only when the mind looks inwards that it communes with reality. The mind, and only the mind, is home to all reality and all goodness.

96

It is the height of absurdity, the most gross ignorance, to expect any investigation *en tois ergois*, to disclose the WHY of anything. Any investigation of the outer world, the world outside the mind, can only show HOW things have come to be as they are: we may then be able to predict how things may come to be at some future time and we may be able to know how we may make things come to be as we desire them to be. But WHY implies intent and purpose and intent and purpose have no meaning except in a mind and for a mind. It is only meaningful to speak of WHY when speaking of human doings. When we speak of the WHY of happenings in the outer world we should confess that we are foisting OUR intents

and purposes on the gods. Some humans are arrogant enough or foolish enough to permit themselves to do that. But others, very intelligent and very learned, speak of WHY in relation to the outer world because they fail to distinguish between WHY and HOW; and they fail to make the distinction because they have no use for the true WHY; and that is so because they are not in the habit of looking within themselves: they employ their minds on the outside world and are not even aware that the outside world has no meaning and no being except in their minds and for their minds.

97

All my thinking life I have been lured by one dream: to behold the One in the Many. I dreamed of that vision and have never been without that dream: how else could I in my innermost being be one and whole? All my writings have been, in various ways, gropings for that vision. Diotima's speech in the *Symposion* was a veritable ascent to the One as Beauty. In the *Politeia* I came nearest to giving articulate expression to the vision in the Form of the Good that is beyond *ousia* and beyond *epistêmê*. But the vision remains ineffable.

98

I have often, half in anger half in pain, spoken harshly of poets and poetry. What

vengeance have the Graces not wrought on me? I have for a whole lifetime been doing nothing but making poetry. I have sometime spoken of philosophy as music, and it is so indeed, but more specifically philosophy is *poiêsis*. What business has philosophy with the mundane truth that is slave to things outside the mind and not kin to the mind? Philosophy's only concern is with the *alêtheia* that is nowhere but in the mind and is no other thing than the mind and that can only be revealed in *muthoi* created by the mind. Yes, the genuine philosopher speaks myth, knowing and declaring the myth to be myth. A philosopher who pretends to speak truth commits treason against the *Nous* that admits no *alêtheia* beside its own and allows no reality other than the ever flowing fount of its creativity.

99

I ask myself: Am I wiser now than I was when a boy? Overlooking for now the obscenity of ascribing to oneself wisdom at any time, the honest answer must be, No. I am more knowledgeable, more articulate. But to the measure that I have more knowledge and greater articulation I am farther removed from the true fountain of light. The pure light of wisdom is an emanation of the fullness of life and love and joy that is our birthright. With years come cares and attachments and the conceit of knowledge, all of which dim that pristine light. The wisdom that

may come with age is only the understanding that all of that accretion is falsehood and deception and that the only wisdom possible to a human being is in seeking to unveil that pristine light, to rekindle the intelligence inherent in simple love and joy and life in its purity.

100

I sought to leave behind me what if rightly taken leads to the turning of the mind's eye within, where alone there is reality and intelligence and life; what, to be given outwardly, had to be given in a body foreign to the reality within. Now my journey is concluded, I sense my end is near, and to prophesying I am bent. I see that many for many revolutions of the stars will be busied with the body. Yet again I see two from the Land of the Nile, the one nearer to me in time and in tongue and even with some resemblance in name, the other farther away in time with a barbaric tongue and a barbaric name, to those two it will be given to have communion with the soul within.

Eutuchei

NOTES

12. If it seems that I have made Plato too naïve in his approach to the problem of clear and correct thinking, I would point out that Descartes, coming after centuries of devoted and intensive study of the Aristotelean canon, had no more to say about what is needed for correct thinking than what I make Plato say here. I think Leibniz, Frege, Russell, and Co. have done nothing but entice their followers into a maze of false hopes. Wittgenstein saw the folly and the vacuity of it all, but he had been convinced by Russell that that was the only way open to true knowledge, so he fell into despair. But I have already repeatedly dealt with this question in my writings and will not expand on it here.

19. "Philippus of Opus, the reputed transcriber of the *Laws*." (A. E. Taylor, *The Laws*, Introduction, p. xi.)

22. For Thucydides on reporting speeches see *The Peloponnesian War*, I.23. The phrases I have quoted are from Jowett's translation.

23. See further #33 and #73 on Plato's method of collection and division and the note on the latter, below.

34. Perhaps it's not out of place here to recall the (in)famous poker incident when, in October 1946, Karl Popper and Ludwig Wittgenstein had a quarrel in the presence of a group of intelligent and intellectually highly trained witnesses, who nevertheless later gave quite divergent accounts of the incident.

47. *ho men gar sunoptikos dialektikos, ho de mê ou.* - *Republic*, 537c. This seminal statement is fundamental to Plato's philosophical outlook and I think it has not received the attention it deserves from Platonists and students of philosophy. In *Plato: An Interpretation* I quote it and comment on it more than once.

63. I am not offering Aristotle's authorship of the *Alcibiades* as a serious conjecture. The *Alcibiades* could have been written by any of Plato's pupils, but I cannot see it as having been written by Plato himself.

64. I think that for what I say of Critias's *Sisyphus* here I am indebted to either Gomperz or Zeller, but I have lost the exact reference.

73. I have given my assessment of the method of collection and division in *Plato: An Interpretation*

(2005), especially in chapters 10 and 11 dealing with the *Sophist* and the *Philebus* respectively.

77. I owe the thought of this entry to Theodor Gomperz in *The Greek Thinkers*, Vol. II, English translation by G. G. Berry, 1905, p.71, where Gomperz gives the following lines from an elegy “composed by Aristotle on the early death of his fellow-student, Eudemus of Cyprus”:

“Thus by precept and deed hath he convincingly proved / That to be happy and good is for ever not two things, but one thing, / That to be either alone passes the power of man.”

Gomperz points out that the man here spoken of is to be identified with Socrates, but that Aristotle says this in an elegy on Eudemus intimates that he thought of him as another such man.

79. If it is not too mischievous, I would dedicate this section to Thomas A. Szlezak and the cult of the *agrapha dogmata*.

80. At *Charmides* 169d the method of inquiring from a hypothesis, investigating its consequences, putting off for the time being the examination of the truth of the hypothesis itself, is clearly suggested and employed. Socrates' discourses always proceeded by examining the consequences of a proposal suggested by his interlocutor. The description of the method of inquiry from hypotheses in the *Phaedo* and the *Meno* was not

introducing a method newly discovered by Plato but was simply explicating what was implied in Socrates' opting to examine things *en tois logos*. Plato in his writings up to the *Republic* was exploring the lessons and implications of Socrates' principles and methods. In the central part of the *Republic* he worked all that into a coherent whole. After a number of years of teaching in the Academy, during which he did little or no writing, he turned to exploring new problems; this in no way altered the fundamentals of the philosophy developed in the earlier period and expounded in the *Republic*.

82. In making Plato refer to Diogenes as a mad dog I do not mean to impute any denigration on the part of Plato towards Diogenes. In a well-known anecdote, Plato is said to have described Diogenes as a 'Socrates gone mad'. Plato would not call anyone a Socrates, even if a mad Socrates, without harbouring within himself profound admiration towards that person.

92. In *Socrates' Prison Journal* (2006), I carried out the reversal of roles indicated here.